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SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

RIVINGTONS

London	<i>Waterloo Place</i>
Oxford	<i>High Street</i>
Cambridge	<i>Trinity Street</i>

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SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THE REV. T. T. CARTER, M.A.

RECTOR OF CLEWER, BERKS

AND HONORARY CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, OXFORD



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Preface

THE favourable reception which has been given to the volume of Practical Spiritual Theology, drawn from one of the works of Guillore, published not long ago,* has encouraged the preparation of another volume, which is an endeavour, by the same author, to reproduce in our tongue further portions of his teaching. It differs, however, from the former volume, as to its composition, in this respect—that while the one was a free translation of a simple treatise, this which is now offered to the English reader is gathered out of different treatises; rather, the substance drawn out of two or three of Guillore's books.


The special object of the volume is to supply practical advice in matters of conscience, such as may be generally applicable. While it offers, as it is hoped, much valuable help to Directors, it is full of suggestions which may be useful to anyone in private. It thus fulfils a double purpose, which is not, as far as I am aware, otherwise provided for, at least, not in so full and direct a manner.

The term "Direction" calls for some explanation. The very fact of embracing in a single volume what is intended to be useful at once to Directors and to private

* 'Self-Renunciation,' edited by the Rev. T. T. Carter. RIVINGTONS.

individuals, shows that the term is not supposed to imply a purely esoteric field of thought. Strictly speaking, of course it relates only to the exercise of spiritual guidance by a priest, but its subject matter concerns everyone alike in the discipline of life. The object of Direction is not, as it is too commonly imagined, to overrule the action of individual conscience, or to enslave the judgment. It is not the enforcement of rules calculated to supersede the mind's own energies, or substitute a priestly craft for the laws which regulate the soul's individual responsibility. Great misconstructions have clouded the whole subject of spiritual guidance in the popular mind. The dread of losing the independence which we have happily learnt to consider as the safeguard of truth, and the deep-seated prejudices which, unhappily, have too long clung to the idea of confession, have tended to convert what God meant to be the greatest possible aid in the spiritual life, the surest relief to perplexed and troubled consciences, into an occasion of bitter controversy, or an object of indiscriminating terror.

That we are in numberless cases unfitted to guide ourselves without some external aid, especially in cases of deep concern, such as keenly affect our own interest, our passions, our weaknesses ; that religious questions, above all others, touch with peculiar absorbing force on every part of our lives, and every acting of our minds, accompanied by difficulties and trials from which none can




hope to escape ; that the consequences of error, or wilfulness, or uninformed judgment, may in such cases be of the gravest seriousness ; that habits of sin which may be quite unknown to others, even those most near and dear to us, enfeebling and darkening the mind, render such aid peculiarly necessary ; that while any Christian of mature and disciplined habits of mind may be well able and rightfully entitled to give counsel and advice, yet the priests of God are specially commissioned and empowered both to “keep” and “impart knowledge” in spiritual things, and are set in the midst as fathers and guides of souls, not merely in public ministrations, but also in private offices, in all that concerns the interior life, in a way that can belong to none but divinely authorized persons :—these are points which can hardly be gainsayed ; and yet they are the groundwork on which the principles of direction rest. Spiritual guidance, no doubt, often enters into abstruse and refined questions ; it must often turn on matters of extreme delicacy, calling for the utmost reserve ; but ordinarily, and in the greater number of cases, it will be found to be concerned with matters of detail more or less applicable to all persons—to difficulties and trials “common to man,” to the care of the soul in the common warfare against common enemies.

The desire which must ever be at the heart of a priest with regard to those under his care, is to elevate the

character, to strengthen the latent powers ; to develop the energies of self-control, to lead onward in the course of inward culture, so as to raise the soul above petty scrupulousness, and clear the path of spiritual advancement from needless disquietudes and fancied hindrances, that it may act more confidently in the love of God ; in fact, to develop and aid, not paralyse and hamper, God's own work in the soul, making it more dependent on His Guidance, more trustful of His Mercy, more conscious of His Indwelling Presence, and of a power enabling it to live more perfectly in "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free ;" to be stronger and healthier in itself, while escaping the burden which weighs so despondingly on the struggles of the lonely heart, the long, weary efforts of "ever seeking, and never coming to the knowledge of the truth."

That the time may come when the Church itself will take up this great subject, so long left dependent on private efforts and individual discretion ; that the possibility of abuse and irregularity may be prevented, and legitimate sanction given, not merely by the silent witness of our Prayer Book and Canons, but by a living voice, to what is now commonly allowed to be a true and most important part of ecclesiastical discipline, is greatly to be desired, for the practice of Confession now so largely and increasingly prevails, that it is impossible for it to be ignored or put aside. Those who value and practise it



have a rightful claim to its being recognized as an avowed portion of our system. Those who acknowledge its lawfulness, yet fear its abuse, have an equal claim to its being invested with the safeguard of authoritative rule.

These remarks may be excused in the present day, when so much false theorizing prevails on this momentous subject ; so much alarm to some aroused by any allusion to it ; and when questionings may possibly be provoked by the title of this very book. At the same time it is to be borne in mind, that this work is intended for general use, and has been prepared with the view of being a help to self-guidance, to the training of minds in the habit of self-discipline and thoughtful care in spiritual things. Those who are under the direction of a priest may find it work together with the rules given to them, explaining much that can be expressed in personal advice only by brief suggestion, and enabling them to settle for themselves details which can hardly form the subject matter of direct spiritual guidance. Those who are striving to live before God faithfully without such guidance may draw from this volume much which will guard them from the risks of self-flattery, or the delusions arising from prevailing fallacies ; while it opens views of duty and of self-discipline which cannot fail to raise the standard and deepen the consciousness of personal religion.

It only remains for me to add, that partly from imperfect health, and partly through the necessity of leaving

home for a long period, I have been unable myself to overlook the MSS. as they passed through the press. But I committed this charge to a priest in whose judgment I could entirely confide, and after the careful attention which he has bestowed upon the work, I can confidently commend it as one of great value, likely, with the blessing of God, to further among us real growth and advancement in the Spiritual life.

T. T. CARTER.

ROME, EPIPHANY-TIDE, 1873.

Contents

BOOK I

For Beginners

MAXIM	PAGE
I. The need of a Director ; how to select him, and how to regulate intercourse with him	I
II. The Director should accept those souls whom God commits to his care, rather than go out of his way to seek them	7
III. Inquisitiveness as to a penitent's past life to be avoided, though there are cases when he should be moved to make a general confession	13
IV. Every soul cannot be led alike to the same standard of perfection	19
V. Each individual should be led to seek the perfection of his own state of life	22
VI. Nothing so hinders the soul as insufficient mortification of the senses	28
VII. Bodily austerities should be cautiously laid upon penitents	40
VIII. Highflown talk and the use of many mystical books should be checked	46
IX. Some persons are incapable of the highest aims ; how to distinguish and direct such as these	50

MAXIM	PAGE
X. The penitent should trust to his Director's opinion rather than to his own, as to his spiritual progress	54
XI. The penitent should be generally reserved except with his Director	58
XII. The Director is specially bound to maintain a close union with God during his intercourse with souls ..	61

BOOK II

Maxims for those who are advanced in the Spiritual Life

I. Recollection is an absolute necessity to the Spiritual Life	68
II. He who would lead a soul to God must persevere in purifying it both inwardly and outwardly	94
III. The Director should specially strive to cure his penitent of all excessive natural clings, however trifling ..	98
IV. True mortification must be simple	100
V. Souls that are struggling with weariness and discouragement must be trained to a loving acceptance of dryness and darkness	106
VI. How to use distractions in prayer	110
VII. Nothing so unites us to Jesus as abjection	118
VIII. Shame cheerfully borne a high point towards perfection	123
IX. Silence sanctifies crosses	127
X. A spirit of absolute resignation is necessary in order to God's sole reign in the soul	134

MAXIM	PAGE
XI. Amid all manner of crosses and temptations the soul should be trained to offer itself yet more	139
XII. The perfection of sacrifice lies in self-surrender	140
XIII. The Christian, as a temple of the Holy Ghost, must have great respect for himself	144

BOOK III

Maxims for those who have entered the Unitive Way

I. When God leads a soul by extraordinary paths, the Director must deal very cautiously	149
II. The soul which is striving after union with God must be wholly detached from all else	152
III. A good Director will ascertain and promote the special leading God vouchsafes to individual souls	157
IV. Those who have entered the Unitive way must be helped to give up all independent action	160
V. It is sometimes profitable to the soul to be left awhile to its troubles	163
VI. It does not necessarily follow that an incapacity to remember and sorrow for past sin is the sign of a bad disposition	168
VII. The truest peace is found in abiding peacefully where God places us	170
VIII. We must not be surprised at the occasional falls of those who have made great progress in holiness	174
IX. Jesus Christ Alone must reign in the soul	179
X. It specially behoves those who are dedicated to God's service to obey the precepts of Jesus Christ	184

MAXIM	PAGE
XI. We must "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" in all circumstances and all difficulties	191
XII. The Christian's every action must be kindled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ	196

BOOK IV

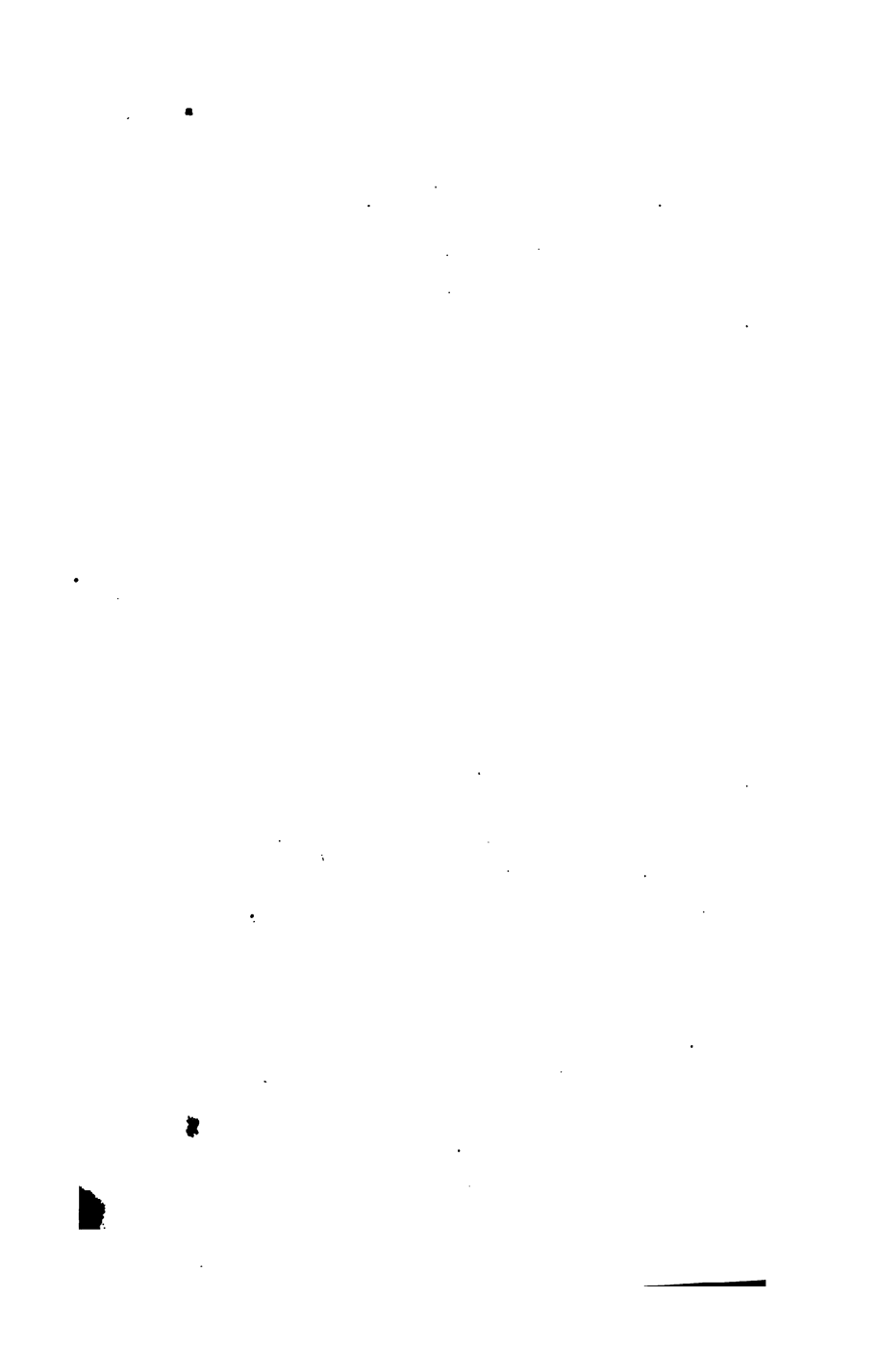
On Progress in Holiness

I. Everyone who seeks to lead a holy life must be trained to meditation	202
II. How to use mental prayer profitably	209
III. Everyone should follow his special attraction in mental prayer	213
IV. General resolutions are a snare to many	216
V. Good resolutions will not last unless the soul prepare itself to encounter temptation	223
VI. Those who would advance towards perfection must submit themselves to three kinds of rule	230
VII. Some hints as to giving rules	241
VIII. Fervent beginners must be watchful, and not set too eagerly to work	246
IX. The best means of subduing the passions	253
X. There can be no real progress in holiness without attacking the besetting sin	259
XI. The means of victory	269
XII. A man's growth in any virtue is forwarded by the corresponding temptation	278
XIII. How to deal with men's natural virtues	284

Contents

XV

MAXIM	PAGE
XIV. Bodily austerities are not always the best remedy against temptations of the flesh	289
XV. On sundry dispositions of the advanced soul	294
XVI. Those who would make progress in the ways of holi- ness, must learn to "wait" on the Lord	299
XVII. The life of Faith the highest of all	305
XVIII. Those who are specially dedicated to God are thereby called to aim at a special sanctification of their lives	309
XIX. The Holy Spirit of God will not enter save into a recollected soul, or dwell save in a humble soul, or converse save with a simple soul	314



BOOK I

Maxims for Beginners

I

The necessity of a Director,—how to select him, and to regulate intercourse with him.

§ 1. FEW but are ready to grant the need of direction ; nevertheless, for the most part, people dislike it practically, and that because direction implies submission and control, whereas everyone prefers following his own will to that of another. Still the necessity of direction is imperative, and however earnest your will may be to tread in God's ways, you cannot turn His gifts to the best account without some such help. Consider the weakness of your nature—how prone you are to fall, how languid, how lukewarm, how disheartened you are apt to be. Are you always able to rise up alone, or to urge your own steps forward ? Our natural tendency to spare and indulge ourselves is so great that few men have courage to contend against self resolutely, and a directing hand from without, to raise us when we fall, to stimulate

and urge us onwards, is essential to our spiritual life. Again, the endless occasions of sin which daily surround you, point out the same need ; for if you are attracted and solicited in so many directions to evil, how sorely do you need some counteracting influence to uphold you, to help in bursting the enthralling chains of sin, to avert perils, and lift you above the snares of human respect? You must know well that it is hard to stand alone against the fierce assaults or the seducing wiles of the occasions of sin we encounter. Again, who is strong enough to withstand unaided the temptations of the flesh and the wiles of the devil? Dare you trust to your own strength? A steadfast course in matters of conscience and the spiritual life is most difficult by reason of the storms which come over us, the storms which assail us, the endless hidden motives which affect us. And are you so presumptuous as to imagine yourself able to guide yourself in respect of that for which the holiest and wisest of men have felt incompetent, for which the clearest understanding craves more light, the best trained experience greater wisdom? Surely you will be ready to grant that those who have no director are more exposed to stray and fall, if only from lack of restraint, than those who are checked by the consciousness that they will have to lay their errors before one they reverence?

§ 2. The next point is to make a wise and prudent choice of a director. In all common practical matters

men do whatever lies in their power to obtain the best advice ; surely you would do no less in a matter of such consequence, one affecting your soul for eternity ? To this end then be instant in prayer, asking God to show you (as He did to the Apostles in the case of S. Matthias) whom He has chosen as your guide. God's choice should direct yours. Having made this preparation, you may choose from two points of view, in either of which God will guide you. The first is an instinctive attraction to certain directors which we feel almost without being able to account for it ; a manner of selection which may be good, but which is doubtful, and subject to delusions. The second is the deliberate choice of a reflecting mind, which, seconded by the Spirit of Grace, will not be liable to error. Seek then to select a man who (1) is capable of the task,—for an incapable, half-trained man, however worthy, is likely to lead you into mistakes and difficulties ; (2) a spiritually-minded man, for though a learned but unspiritual man may not mislead you, he will cause you many a trouble for want of understanding the interior life ; (3) an experienced man, for it is not every learned and spiritual man who possesses that practical experience in the guidance of souls which is won only in the exercise thereof ; and (4) one who is thoroughly disinterested, otherwise he will not be able freely and fully to lead you according to the Spirit of God.

Above all, avoid the error which some commit who

use direction as a mere form. Such men seek an easy-going director, who will be indulgent and give way to their inclinations ; they ingratiate themselves in his favour by pleasant social intercourse, and strive practically to direct their director. They care more to be under a man of repute, of talent, and agreeable conversation, than under one who will reprove their faults and lead them in the paths of self-mortification. This is a serious evil ; it both fosters self-deceit, and brings holiness and direction into disrepute.

§ 3. Having found a suitable director, you should go on to consider how you may best profit by his guidance. First of all, then, do not imitate those people who are given to change, either through shame when they have fallen into notable faults, or because they are annoyed at not being directed according to their own fancies, or from a love of novelty. Such changeableness is very hurtful to the soul. Nothing confirms bad habits more than such an evasion of the shame we feel when constrained to acknowledge the same faults repeatedly to the same director ; and how can anyone attain any true knowledge of our soul's maladies, if we are constantly passing into fresh hands ? No doctor can cure a material illness of which he does not know the cause ; no patient can be healed who is for ever changing his physician. If your director has been carefully chosen, and accepted as of God's appointment, be very slow to leave him for another.

Avoid too that idle frivolous mind which disposes some people to seek those who are spoken of as remarkable in any way, out of mere curiosity.

§ 4. Let your visits to your director be systematic, and not merely when you go to confession. There is not time for all the counsel you need to be given in the confessional. Many difficulties arise in the spiritual life which need to be set before your guide ; it is profitable to give account of your actions, your correspondence to grace or your failures therein, so as to be advised as to your course. And it is useful sometimes to revive and re-establish your mind, when weary and harassed with the cares of this world, by speaking of the things pertaining to God. There is great need too for those who aim at leading a spiritual life to be strengthened against the errors into which they are apt to fall, even when intending to do well ; and to receive instruction as to their best way of seeking God. All this is sufficient reason to require certain visits to your director, while at the same time they should be well advised, so as not to become either too frequent or too engrossing.

§ 5. Open your heart simply and honestly, and remember that there are some things which should only be mentioned in confession. Give heed also only to confer with your director on what concerns your soul, and having done so, take your departure without waiting for him to dismiss you. Little personal details and trifling

gossip are very prone to slip in, and without strict watchfulness such interviews are liable to degenerate into a hundred useless trivialities. Remember too that these visits should be brief. Their object is to supply the necessities of the soul, and such necessities do not require hours of prolonged intercourse, as some seem to consider,—an abuse which has led to serious evils and too great familiarity.

§ 6. Ordinarily it does not seem well to follow a plan some have lately adopted, of separating the confessor from the director. There are many things which should only be mentioned in the sacrament of confession, and which nevertheless should be told in order to the right guidance of the soul. How then is the director, who is not also confessor, to act? He must either give a blind guidance for lack of knowledge, or he must receive communications and ask questions which should be kept to the confessional? This divided system results in one great abuse, namely, that while the confessor only hears a formal list of faults, the heart's secrets and innumerable little confidences are reserved for the director. Of course there are circumstances under which you may be rightly advised to have a director apart from your ordinary confessor, but such cases are exceptional.

§ 7. A change of confessor should be rare; nevertheless, while you should be thoroughly submissive to him, you should not be a slave to human respect, when

there are good reasons for leaving him. If you are conscious that he is tenacious of his influence over you, or that he dislikes your communicating with anyone else, or if in any respect he betrays an over-earthly mind in his intercourse with you, then indeed quit him, for he is not fit to guide your soul. He should teach you detachment by his example, instead of involving you in earthly attachments ; and if he casts down instead of building up, he will do you more harm than good, nor can you make spiritual progress under his rule. Some timid people dare not leave a director, even when conscious that he is hindering their souls' progress. Avoid such weakness, and without yielding to an immoderate attachment to any human being, take that help which suits your need, and guard yourself alike against slavish fear and weak complaisance.

II

The Director should accept those souls God's Providence commits to his care rather than go out of his way to seek them.

§ 1. **T**HE case of the director is different from that of the penitent. While the latter ought diligently to seek a good director, the former should never seek the direction of anyone. And this needs urging forcibly on all who are likely ever to be called to that office, for great are the evils ensuing on the breach of this rule. We have a great many most wise and saintly directors among us,

but it cannot be denied that there is also a danger lest certain men aim at attracting a crowd of penitents, and do harm under the pretext of zeal for souls. One shrinks from admitting that such unworthy causes as rank and worldly position, or personal attractions, or mere interested motives, should ever influence a director of souls ; or it may be the love of power, or the reputation of guiding persons of well-known piety. But it is too true that such abuses have occurred, and holy men have not hesitated to give such warning to their younger brethren.

A director, then, should simply accept the guidance of such souls as God's Providence may commit to him. The king assigns every one of his officers his post, and God distributes His offices. Every responsibility or rule is a Divine commission, and as that of the direction of soul^s is at once the highest and most difficult of all trusts, it pertains to God Alone to appoint directors, and to commit those whom they are intended to guide into their hands. At the same time He generally permits a mutual sympathy to promote His views, as we may see in the marked attraction people feel for some particular director, and the special facility they find in opening their hearts to him and being led by him. Confidence in a director is usually the foundation of the workings of Grace, and co-operates with them most effectually. And God, Who has made us all, and Who knows exactly how He has framed each individual heart, will surely direct those who need

guidance to such guides as are fittest for their wants, without directors going out of their way to seek them.

§ 2. We may take it for granted that individual souls require special graces in direction, and that God will impart these special graces only to that director whom He has chosen to lead the particular soul in question. But if a director has gone out of his way through any earthly motive to undertake the guidance of some individual, and has not been called to it by God, he will not be endowed with such grace, and the consequences will be : (1) That soul will not profit by his direction, and he will not know the path in which God would have it go. (2) His direction will be of an earthly, natural character, because he is himself devoid of supernatural grace ; and what can be more pitiable than to be left to one's own sense and judgment in one of the most difficult and delicate of all possible works, which needs all God's grace if it is to succeed. Woe to that hapless soul which falls into the hands of a man who deals with it from a mere human point of view, and according to his own private judgment ! Such dealing does not deserve the name of direction ; it is a mere trading in spiritual things, which is all the more dangerous, that it is a cloak for a worldly spirit. (3) Where God's Grace is lacking—a grace which is the safeguard of holiness to both director and penitent,—mere human attachments are easily contracted, unseemly friendships, it may be even actual scandals, shaming alike

religion and Christianity. Depend upon it, any such pitiful case arises from the director not having possessed that special grace which would have been his security.

§ 3. Let those then who may be engaged by God's Providence in the direction of souls, consider : I. That every director should distinctly bear in mind that it is not necessary to his salvation that he should have a single penitent, and that he will do well to look upon his ministry with the utmost detachment, rather ready to shun than to seek it. Let him also remember that to be considerably occupied in the guidance of souls may prove a very easy means of falling to his own soul, unless he watches himself very carefully, always holding fast to God's Presence, and striving after a most recollected spirit. And this, because the heart is soon enthralled by the confidences poured into it; the imagination is still more readily sullied by the countless tales of misery and wretchedness to which the ear must needs hearken, and the senses are liable to be influenced by the personal attractions, manners or sympathies of those with whom the director has to deal. Almost everything tends to surround him who is striving to lead others to holiness with perils for his own soul, unless he is ever on his guard and maintains a strict watch over self.

II. If it is needful that the penitent should make a wise choice of his director, so too the director should receive everyone without distinction, as a soul committed

to him by God, as one for whom he must give account, and on whose behalf sanctifying grace is entrusted to him. He should give himself more willingly to the poor than to the rich, as the representatives of Jesus Christ, and also because he can more surely rely upon the purity of his intention, than where there is more which suits his taste and mind. A good director should not esteem silk above serge, or take more pleasure in seeing himself surrounded by well-known or fashionable people, than by the poor or less taught. Let your reception of all be alike, save that you give the kindest to those who are forlorn and miserable.

III. Be wholly indifferent as to whether your penitents leave you or abide by you. Undoubtedly you should have a father's heart and a mother's carefulness for those who are under your guidance, nor should you for a moment adopt a hard severity which can never smooth and brighten the path of religion ; but you should be free from all desire to retain a hold over people, or regret if they leave you for other guidance. While under your care you were bound to do all you could for them ; be at peace now when they seek other help. Say to yourself that God does not see fit to use you any further in this matter, that perhaps you have not rightly used the grace He entrusted to you, and therefore He withdraws it ; that your capabilities are too slender, and that because you cannot lead such souls any further, God

commits them to abler hands. Such thoughts as these befit a director when his penitents leave him. But beware of being disturbed and losing your peace of mind because thereof.

IV. Let those who frequent you, especially women, feel that you accept their visits rather than that you desire them. Let them feel that you receive them out of priestly charity, rather than from natural inclination. It is inconceivable how quick people are to detect their director's weak points, and to notice if he is disposed to waste time and to be interested in trivial conversation; or how easily they receive a disadvantageous impression and feel fear or even contempt for one towards whom they should feel nought save veneration. You will be much more appreciated if you are not over lavish in your intercourse, and if, without withholding any help really wanted, you know how to repress all undue excitement and over-eagerness.

V. The director's words should always turn upon God when speaking with a penitent. He should seek the Seraphim lips, so that he may impart the fulness of his own grace and unction to those who approach him. But how can this be if he is inquisitive concerning the numberless topics of the day, the gossip of town or household, a secularity which must cause scandal rather than edification? The director should always maintain a reserved manner and a serious composure, such as will

keep those he receives in their proper place, whether they be men or women. Nothing can be worse than for a penitent to be led on to undue freedom by the want of dignified reserve on his director's part. While avoiding all repulsive austerity, you cannot be too careful in preserving a seemly dignity. You should shun extremes, but of the two an over-severe manner is a less evil than too much eagerness and expansiveness.

III

Inquisitiveness as to his penitent's past life to be avoided, though there are cases in which he should be moved to make a general confession.

§ I. IT is not uncommon to find directors who are in a great hurry to know all that concerns the past life of those who come into their hands. These men seem to think that nothing can be done without searching out every corner of the conscience, as though all who have previously dealt with the penitent had been wanting in skill or in zeal to purge out the poison of sin, and lead him in the way of righteousness. The excuse for such a line is zeal for souls, and the success it has obtained in individual cases; but sometimes this zeal is a cloak for curiosity, and there is a strong temptation to be curious

when we are dealing with the hidden secrets of men's hearts. But this must be guarded against, for it is a low earthly inclination.

The really good director, however solicitous for a person's welfare, will always think first of his soul. Such a one does not seek to penetrate farther into the heart than he is called to do, and at each fresh step he waits to be invited onwards. He avoids as far as possible all communications which might sully his own purity of heart, knowing well how perilous the tale of sin and defilement too often supplied by a general confession is to the confessor who indulges in mere curiosity. Such narrations must be listened to solely out of charity, and the confessor should as far as possible blot the memory thereof from out his mind. But any uncalled-for research into such dark passages of a penitent's past life is untimely, and will sully his heart.

Moreover, a wise director will be aware that he not only is liable to defile himself, but that the conscience of his penitent will also be damaged by stirring up foul memories of sin and shame, which are not unlikely to leave a more vivid impression of evil than any which can be made for good. He will be perfectly aware that ill-advised handling of the conscience may rekindle dormant temptations, and that an unseasonable general confession may revive some sinful tendency which was well-nigh buried in forgetfulness. I might add that such inquisi-

tiveness is very likely to repulse penitents and keep them from opening their hearts, for while on the one hand we are sometimes willing voluntarily to humble ourselves by laying bare our hearts, on the other nature revolts from having such shame thrust upon us. It is a humiliation which should be purely voluntary, never induced by pressure or authority.

§ 2. But, you will say, are there no cases in which the director ought to take the initiative in order to fathom a conscience, and can he never press a general confession without being guilty of blamable imprudence? Certainly there are such cases. *First*, when a person is forcibly led to turn to God, after having led a disorderly or careless life, it is desirable to move him to make a general confession, because it is very important to foster these first beginnings of contrition, and nothing can kindle compunction and shame more than a survey of the crimes and shortcomings of a man's past life, which must be clearly and truthfully reviewed in a general confession.

Secondly, if the penitent has never made a general confession, especially if he is advancing in life. In such a case the director ought to set the importance thereof before him, and constantly urge it, for unhappily we know but too well how many such persons have shrunk from reviewing their past life, and have kept back grievous sins, either through shame, or gross ignorance, or wilful

smothering of conscience, shunning instruction because they would fain cleave to their sin. Such persons will assure you that they have never omitted anything in their ordinary confessions, and yet if their past lives be examined, you will often bring to light grievous sins which have never been confessed.

Thirdly, there are cases of inward trouble which have no visible source, and which yet harass the soul and sting the conscience without a perceptible reason. Such cases are relieved by a general confession, which will often bring to light the hidden evil which gnawed at the penitent's heart, and thus anxiety and remorse are cleared away, and he is restored to peace. This occurs chiefly with those who, having stifled the first light which was sent to show them their sins, have gone on sinning blindly; or with such as have made their general confession to a confessor who did not understand how to help them to lay bare all their sins by judicious and kindly questioning, and so the poor souls have not confessed everything, through ignorance and cowardice.

Fourthly, a general confession ought to be made on any important change in life, or when such is in contemplation, as for instance marriage, Holy Orders, or the religious life; and this with the view the better to learn God's Will before entering upon such ties, to obtain His Grace and guidance in the new state of life, and to make a fresh beginning in the hitherto untried condition. Nothing can more fitly pre-

pare the soul for heavenly inspirations than the purging away all its impurities, for we need a pure heart in order to be susceptible to God's communications.

Fifthly, There is another rule concerning general confessions which is as important as it is commonly neglected. When, without any spontaneous effort, you feel an involuntary inward stirring, a sorrowful compunction, an aching wound in your heart at the memory of past sin,—then, on no account put away the silent warning, but make a good confession. Do not say that your conscience has been purified already by God's Grace, and that you fear nothing, never mind—this confession is required of you not of necessity, nor by the counsel of your director, but by the Holy Spirit Himself, Who reveals it by arousing such a stirring in your heart. Granted that it is not a necessity, but the Holy Spirit wills to overrule that, and calls upon you to bow more humbly than you have yet done before God's justice in voluntary shame and humiliation. For the most part we move ourselves by pious efforts to make a general confession, and it is well, although the heart is not always greatly roused thereby; but this tender compunction being the work of God's Holy Spirit, the confession to which it leads may lead to many miracles of converting grace. Therefore do not heed those who absolutely forbid any return to past confessions; such an injunction is only applicable to scrupulous souls. Do not burden yourself with a

general confession at every impulse of devout feeling. It is not well to disturb your peace by stirring up the dregs of former sin; but whenever God's Holy Spirit fills you with that tender grace of compunction, then, indeed, you must drink the cup of shame He offers you, and make your confession. There have been strong, noble souls, who have attained the fullest Christian peace, and who nevertheless have continued for months to renew the confession of certain grievous past sins, feeling drawn so to do by as fervid a contrition as though the sin were recent. This is the Holy Spirit's work, He humbles and purifies souls as He will and how He will.

Finally, bear in mind that although your director ought not to be curious as to the troubles of your life, it tends nevertheless greatly to your advancement and perfection, if you are moved to make an ample disclosure to him, laying bare all your infirmities. A very different line of treatment is required by the soul which God has led by the paths of compassion and that which He has led by pure love; and the language to be held to one who has been a great criminal, or to one kept in innocence, is widely unlike. For want of closer knowledge of his penitent a director may misapply his treatment, using means unsuitable to the one or the other alternative. Such errors are always possible unless you freely open your conscience to him whose direction you seek.

IV

Every soul cannot be led alike to the highest class of perfection.

§ 1. **W**HAT! you will exclaim, does not this contradict all that we are taught by the masters of the Spiritual life, to the effect that we must take the highest aim, inasmuch as we are sure to fall short of that which we set before ourselves? But true as this is, it is also true without any contradiction that it is a mistake to urge everyone who longs after perfection indiscriminately towards its highest form. There is a certain fervid devotion which sometimes misleads directors. For in truth, it is not wise to lead persons towards that which is most conformable to nature—yet our natural yearnings often are for that which is startling and brilliant—and it is possible that such yearnings may rather become a school of vanity than of holiness. Many a person takes an ambitious flight, vaguely aiming at the unitive life, as if all other paths were beneath their notice. But is not this to indulge our natural conception, which seeks to exalt itself, and is it not a mistaken guidance which nourishes such pride instead of uprooting it? Nevertheless, it is in this way that spirituality is sometimes perverted to the damage of souls instead of their edification.

There is such a thing as spiritual as well as worldly pride.

§ 2. Moreover, it is important to realize that all minds are not capable of the highest spiritual state, and the perception of this is most essential for their right guidance. All are not called to the like close and intense recollection, some people have not mental power for it, or any inclination thereto, whereas both are requisite for its exercise. A weak brain or an over-excited imagination will not have the qualities required to subject the mind to systematic recollection ; and he who has no attraction that way, will never be able to maintain it. It is not everyone that is able to bear severe mortifications. Some people have neither bodily strength or firmness of resolution to subject themselves to such discipline. Nor can all alike attain to intense contemplation, which is not a thing to be achieved by human systems or efforts—men may prepare themselves for it, but God Alone can lead them to those heights, or keep them there. And if you overstrain the soul, and strive to wind it to a pitch beyond its compass, it will inevitably rebel, and end by a great distaste for religious exercises. First fervours soon pass away, while all that is difficult and hard remains, and the overwrought mind falls back discouraged, and fancying itself even weaker than it is, learns to count the higher regions of holiness altogether unattainable. Thence it follows that supposing all real goodness to dwell in these

inaccessible heights, the discouraged soul slackens all its endeavours, and ceases to strive after perfection.

§ 3. From this injudicious overstraining arise self-exalted imaginations and the delusions which beset those who aim at a height to which they are not called. In the same way indiscreet mortification often injures health, and the body becomes incapable of bearing any ascetic discipline from having aimed at overmuch.

Set the fact, then, clearly before your mind, that God does not call everyone alike to a sublime perfection, just as He has not made every star to be a sun, or endowed every intellect with seraphic intensity. Every man is not born to be a king, nor are all precious stones diamonds.

You will perhaps say, If all men are not to be led towards the highest paths of perfection, how are we to judge in what way they must be dealt with, and to what aim we should point them? Now, in order to guide individuals rightly, each in his own appointed path, it is necessary to discern a person's capacity, aptitude, and the calling wherewith God has called him. To this end you should give heed to three points:—1st, temperament; 2nd, the nature of the mind; and 3rd, the inward attractions which draw it to holiness; according as a person's temperament is melancholy or phlegmatic or irritable, so he must be trained to special virtues; and your treatment must be expansive or repressive according

as the mental nature of the man is dull, lively, or independent. If he has special attractions towards holiness and perfection, you should carefully examine them to see how far they are merely the result of natural temperament, and if they prove to be deeply rooted, they must guide you in the aim you set before him. The director who neglects these precautions, and who seeks to lead all souls alike according to his own lofty conceptions, will soon find himself mistaken, and tending to make his penitents proud and visionary, rather than building them up in solid virtue and piety.

V

*Each individual should be led to seek the perfection of
his own state of life.*

§ 1. **T**HIS maxim is the natural result of the last, for if we must not strive to lead everyone alike to the highest perfection, the question of course arises, To what aim must we point them? And I reply, each individual must be led to perfect himself in his own state of life, and in his own special vocation.

Nevertheless this simple rule is greatly neglected, and consequently many souls fall short of their calling, and much that is pretentious in its external appearance of

holiness proves hollow and unreal when proved and tested. The chief causes of this evil are twofold—first, that men are apt to look with contempt on the perfection peculiar to their own occupation and state of life ; and next, that directors are too much given to lead all alike to their own standard, without adaptation to individual character.

The first of these facts is obvious. Many people there are who have no sooner entered upon the pursuit of holiness, than they get upon a wrong track, which altogether misleads them. Thus a wife takes up devotional exercises which cause her to neglect her family ; a daughter whose home duties claim her attention is bent upon the religious life ; a man devotes himself to good works while leaving his public or private responsibilities undone or ill done. Even in communities, those who hold office often fulfil their duties imperfectly, because they look out of these to an ideal perfection, whereas the diligent fulfilment of common tasks is the true perfection set before them. All this arises from the unfortunate propensity we all have to think more highly of what is out of reach, than of what comes naturally in our way. We like all that is remarkable, we prefer doing differently to others ; it would almost seem as though we thought there were some special grace in striking out a new path for ourselves. Our love of independence makes us like self-chosen toil rather than that which is obligatory, and that merely because we dislike to submit ourselves. And so the result is that we

aim at a perfection which is not that to which we are called.

§ 2. The second cause of this evil is that directors very naturally try to form those who are under their guidance according to their own standard, and after their own style. Thus, a director who has great faith in bodily austerity, will use it largely in direction, and will impose it freely upon his penitents, although it may be that sometimes the results tend more to pride than to humility. One much given to contemplation will direct people as though they were all contemplatives, assuming that all other ways are unworthy of such as are in earnest. The essentially practical man is apt to cumber his penitents with methods and systems of devotion, esteeming a more simple spiritual devotion to be trivial and waste of time—whereas such methods, excellent in themselves, become a heavy burden to some consciences, deprive them of spiritual liberty, and stifle the Voice of God's Holy Spirit within them. The learned director sometimes makes a great point of study, and will advise his penitents to read many abstruse and mystical books, which too often leads to vanity and presumption. Or one who is much given to good works and very zealous among the poor, will give all his energies to inspire those he directs with the like objects, urging them indiscriminately to active charities, visiting hospitals, prisons, the poor, and the like: most pious occupations doubtless, but full of distractions, and in which it is

easy to lose a due watchfulness over self, and thus to peril one's own soul while ministering to the bodies of other men. All this is very natural, but it is a serious evil. Be sure direction should take a wide view of things, and adapt itself to the endless variety of persons and dispositions to which it is applied.

§ 3. Once more then, we must train each individual to seek the perfection of his own condition and state of life—the priest has his, which differs from that of the religious ; the wife's perfection is not identical with that of the daughter at home ; and he who is under obedience has a different rule of perfection from his who governs ; whence we may conclude that each one of us, inasmuch as he is called to a given state of life, is also called to attain the perfection of that state, as its aim and end. Consequently the director's business is to teach those under his guidance how to attain that perfection. Moreover, bear in mind that all such perfection as is not applicable to your own condition and state of life, ceases to be perfection for you. The perfection of a Carthusian monk is not that of another Order ; what is perfection in a nun is in no ways perfection in a married woman ; that which is required in one of elevated position is not required of one lowlier placed ; the perfection of the superior differs from that of the inferior ; and the perfection of a master is of another character to that which his servant should seek. The true principle of all simply is this.

Perfection lies in a due order of things, and nothing is good save when duly balanced and apportioned by order. Never mind if some other form of perfection seem to you greater or more sublime. However admirable in itself, it ceases to be perfection for you, directly that it does not pertain to your individual condition, and is not according to the due order of things.


Two great evils arise from neglecting this fact. What can tend more to confusion and disorder than when people reverse their respective positions, when the mistress of a family affects the contemplative, or a public officer seeks to lead the life of a monk, or one charged with practical duties neglects them for lengthy devotions? And further, such perversions tend to delusion and unreality, because while aiming thus at a false perfection, he who does so deceives himself with the idea that he is making good progress, while in truth he is straying from his true duties.

Be quite sure that the director's office is solely to try and lead each person to the perfection of his own calling; to make a good religious or secular, a good officer, a good wife, a good daughter, a good servant, restraining the ideal of perfection to each individual vocation, and remembering that to do less than is required of each one therein is unworthy, but to do more, or what is not required by that vocation, is an error.

§ 4. And here you will ask, Does not God sometimes

lead souls to a perfection altogether beyond that of their obvious calling? To this the answer is :—1st. God never calls anyone to a perfection contrary to his state of life, so as to hinder its duties. He never calls the layman to meddle with the priestly office of direction, or the devout woman to take upon herself to direct the consciences of others. He never inspires the wife with the desire to forsake her family duties in order to give herself up to the delights of religious exercises, or the hermit to rush into the world out of sudden zeal. He whose calling binds him to active works of charity is not led to forsake them for contemplation by the Holy Spirit. God does everything in order, and such efforts after perfection to which we are not called, are out of order, and perilous to the soul.

2nd. Nevertheless, God often does inspire the longing for a higher perfection than that to which a man was first called. One living in the world will be drawn to devote himself to God in poverty, chastity, and obedience ; another, despite his busy life of servile tasks, will be drawn to the highest contemplation, and some will be led to practise greater austerities in the world than those of ascetic solitaries. But all these are beyond the secular condition, and a wise director will never seek to lead anyone to such, although he will do his best to promote God's leading when any individual is drawn of Him towards a special and higher perfection. It is a grievous thing to see souls who are extraordinarily drawn of God, stifled in their aspi-



rations, from a want of elasticity or perception ; and God has often called His chosen ones from amid the lowliest states of life and the most uneducated minds.

Do not be surprised, therefore, if God leads a soul beyond its own apparent calling, or your lights ; He therein manifests His universal empire, and displays His mighty designs for that soul ; He sets forth the triumph of His Grace, outstepping all our ideas, and using what seem to us unlikely instruments for His Own Glory. Be it yours to foster the operations of His Hand, and do you work with Him to give wings to that soul, so that, quitting its first lowly calling, it may soar thither where now He summons it.

VI

Nothing so hinders the soul as insufficient mortification of the senses.

§ 1. **T**HERE are different kinds of mortification, which it is essential to distinguish, in order to practise them duly. Mortification of the heart restrains all the inclinations ; mortification of the will controls the independent spirit ; mortification of the understanding leads to the sacrifice of opinion and thought ; mortification of the passions regulates and restrains their impetuosity ; and mortification of the senses controls sensuality

and frivolity. It is this that concerns us now, for we need it continually. The lack thereof is at the root of all our soul's failures, and yet it is but little understood, and still less exercised. Mind, however, we are not here speaking of mortifying the senses in respect of that which is criminal, but in respect of things which we habitually look upon as simple and innocent. It is in such matters as these that we need continually to mortify our senses. But there can be no death unless first there be life ; and before learning how to mortify the senses we must ascertain wherein their life consists. Let us, then, investigate 1st, what that life is, and how it is to be mortified ; 2nd, how, for want of so doing, men grow sensual ; and, 3rd, how nothing so estranges us from God, and makes us deaf to His Voice, as that want.

Philosophers tell us that there are different forms of life : thus, bodily life is sustained by an interior principle ; the life of the soul and of angels is of a higher nature ; and the life of the senses is maintained by external influences. This latter life hangs upon the special objects calculated to foster it. Thus the sense of sight lives upon all that is choice and beautiful ; that of hearing, upon pleasant sounds and harmonies ; the life of the sense of smell lies in sweet perfumes and odours ; that of taste in all that pleases the palate ; that of touch in all that is acceptable to the body and its feelings. Moreover, the essence of this life lies in a certain delectable research or

application of the senses to that which delights them, as when the eye rests complacently on that which is beautiful, when the ear revels in sweet sounds, when the palate indulges in a voluptuous enjoyment of pleasant food.

§ 2. Thus much granted (and everyone's own experience will confirm this), it is not difficult to see wherein lies the death of the senses, which can only be wrought by separating them from that which maintains their life. This separation is twofold; there is a physical cutting asunder, as when a man refuses to gratify his eyes with pleasant sights, his ears with sweet sounds, his taste with delicate meats, and his body with whatsoever pampers its softness. Such cutting off, such privation, is the surest way to the death of the senses, if it be discreetly used; but unless such mortification be subject to obedience and discretion, it is prone to fall into delusions and many errors.

There is another sundering of the senses and their objects, which is moral. In this the object of gratification is used, but not enjoyed. The eye beholds, the nostril inhales, the palate tastes, but without delectation; they accept that which is presented to them, but without dwelling upon the delight, or appropriating it by any deliberate intention of enjoying it. This may take place either through a certain suspension of the senses—by which the mind withholds them from yielding to the impression made upon them—or by so entire a recollection of the mind that it almost wholly loses consciousness

of that which is external and sensual. Thus again we have thorough mortification of the senses ; so that there is no more active enjoyment in their gratification than would be felt by one who is actually dead.

§ 3. Bear in mind, however, that this latter purely moral mortification of the senses is a most delicate and dangerous matter. It is a special snare to people whose devotion is of an easy, accommodating nature, and who make it an excuse for indulging themselves in whatever is acceptable to their senses. This is, in truth, but a refinement of sensuality. None save saints, be sure, can use their eyes and ears, and all their senses freely, without fear of sullyng their soul ; and if such as we are would mortify them, it must be through continual renunciation of all that gratifies them. You must accept this principle fully before going farther into the subject.

§ 4. The second truth to be impressed upon the mind is, that nothing tends so much to make men sensual and animal, even in the use of that which is innocent, as the keenness and unmortified condition of their senses. And this truth needs special commending to that class of men who, while professing to lead a spiritual life, give way to what they consider the lawful indulgences of the senses.

First, then, such indulgence strengthens a man's sensual tastes ;—the spirit lives upon that which is spiritual, the flesh upon that which is fleshly. In proportion as the

flesh is fed and nourished, it will grow more carnal and sensual, and gradually it will seek to overpower the spirit; as a Father of the Church has said, "the senses are as windows of the body, through which the poison of pleasure enters and corrupts the soul."

All things of earth are naturally corrupt, and our senses have their share of corruption. God has permitted Satan to usurp this dominion over all creation since the Fall; and those creatures which in the primitive state of innocence were subject to man now overpower him, being weapons in the devil's hand. By reason of this it is that the Angel in the Apocalypse restrained the angels, "to whom it was given to hurt the earth, the sea, and the trees."¹ Our senses have borne the stamp of corruption ever since original sin came into the world, and the Fathers tell us that they may be sullied even by the use of the simplest things. We see how the Church has accepted this truth by the emphatic words which are used in administering Extreme Unction, when the Priest prays over each sense, "*Indulgent tibi Dominus, quidquid per oculus deliquisti,*" &c. And there is the more danger of falling that so many ordinary gratifications of the senses seem in no way wrong. Magnificent dwellings, gorgeous furniture, exquisite harmony, interesting news, whether public or private, pleasant scents;—do not most good people indulge in all these as freely as men of the

¹ Rev. vii. 2, 3.

world? Does it even occur to them to deny themselves in such matters, and is not he who would inculcate abstinence therein looked upon as a stern ascetic who calls on men to practise a detachment for which angels only are fit? Yet it is through these bright and pleasant things that corruption steals into the senses and overpowers them.

§ 5. Remember that all the passions of an unmortified man sully him as well as the abuse of his powers, but they are at times in abeyance, or their objects are removed, and therefore it is not a continual soil. But the unmortified senses are perpetually surrounded by objects which rouse and tempt them. The whole earth is full of snares, which lure us. We are like limed birds, whose wings are glued and restrained, so that they become an easy prey to the fowler; and S. Bernard says that in the same way men are snared by a pleasant, easy yielding to their senses, through which corruption enters, and seizes upon their mind.

This is all the more readily effected that sensual gratification steals upon men so insidiously as to take them by surprise, and they do not take precautions against enemies who make so fair a show. Thus a constant lack of mortification creeps over the senses, which are for ever surrounded by temptations, and by degrees the mind is dragged down through a like strange and fatal corruption.

§ 6. Thirdly, consider what power the unmortified

senses have over the soul's faculties. We all know how much power woman has to enervate and corrupt man, and the power of the senses over the spirit is no less active. S. Augustine likens the heart to another Paradise, in which the senses and the spirit are as Adam and Eve ; going on to say that, as Eve persuaded Adam to yield to his inclinations, and so to fall, in like manner the senses exercise a vast empire over the mind, and press upon it, by their baneful seductions, till it is corrupted and falls.

Note, again, how all moral corruption, even to the loss of the soul, is wont to proceed from unmortified senses. All the noblest faculties of the soul are governed by the imagination, and the imagination is governed by the senses : when they soil it with unworthy images, it affects the superior faculties, harassing them with anxious fears, enervating them with carnal tastes, and finally gaining consent of the will through continual perseverance. But before all this takes place, the imagination itself must have been contaminated by the senses, and thus, I say again, they are the source whence all corruption of the will and understanding flows. S. Augustine says that he fell back into the sins he had well-nigh conquered through contact of his senses with external objects.

I would appeal to the conscience of most men. Will they not own that their most grievous sins have been caused by things seen or heard, or by impressions received through the senses ? And is not this a sufficient proof

that their insufficient mortification is the greatest peril to the soul? S. Gregory of Nicœa says that he who lives the life of the senses becomes a mere animal; his soul, already the captive of his body, goes on to become the mere slave of sensuality, and the higher part of the man perishes.

§ 7. The second evil and necessary consequence of not mortifying the senses is, that nothing so estranges man from God. How can those who rest in mere outward satisfaction of the senses be capable of tasting or appreciating the things of God, who is wholly Spirit, with whom the flesh can have no part or fellowship? If we would become fit for union with God, we must strive to spiritualise both body and senses by continual mortification; for just as the body has power to materialise the soul, so the spirit is able, through mortification, to spiritualise the body.

Even were it not so, surely experience would teach us that God's Holy Spirit is so pure and so sensitive as to be intolerant of the slightest spiritual stain. This is a truth which all versed in the hidden life know to their cost. They know well that it needs but a frivolity, an idle pleasure, a glance, a lack of vigorous intention, to cause God to hide His Face from them, it may be for days or weeks, leaving them in a chill and darkness, which calls forth all their powers of patient endurance while they wait and sigh for His return. And if union with God is

marred by these lighter, more spiritual hindrances, how much more by a gross material state of the senses, which are generally devoid of His Presence in proportion as they are filled and satisfied with earthly objects. Unhappy those who will purchase a mere worthless sensual pleasure at so fatal a cost; who care more to be at large and unrestrained in earthly things than to enjoy the Presence of God within their hearts; who, professing to seek after holiness and the spiritual life, yet voluntarily thrust themselves out of the heart's paradise rather than bring their body and senses into captivity to the law of Christ!

8. Everyone will grant that prayer is indispensable to all approach to God. But unmortified senses make a man incapable of prayer. He whose heart is overrun with material aims, whose senses are filled with earthly impressions, carries them into his prayers and meditations, and these vain imaginations rise up as a cloud between him and his God, says S. Augustine. For this reason everyone who aims at the true interior life and a close union with God, will give most diligent heed to banish earthly imaginations by guarding his senses well. It is a strange delusion to suppose that we can enter into a close walk with God, and yet keep our senses alive to every outward impression. But this is what some do, who fancy they may indulge them in whatever is not actually wrong. If, however, you could see into such men's prayers, you would find them disturbed and marred

by a crowd of idle thoughts and imaginations which hide God's Face from them. Nor are these clouds the only evil attending upon such self-indulgence; it becomes a very scourge to him who has yielded to it, by the distractions and weariness, amounting often to disgust for holy things, which arise from the mental attitude caused thereby, and which is altogether opposed to the religious and spiritual mind. Believe me, if you would draw near to God in meditation, you must stedfastly resolve to die daily to all that is sensual; so that, being wholly detached from earthly visions and imaginations, your soul may, Abraham-like, "talk with God as a friend." An occupied heart, strong passions, ill-regulated mind, a perverse will, separate men from God because they are sinful; but these are spiritual vices, and we may venture to say that they really tend less to the estrangement of a soul from God than the material, carnal state of him who fails to restrain and mortify his senses.

· § 9. It is not hard, then, to see why so few Christians are really men of prayer, why so many give way to ill-regulated passions. Their senses are not ruled and mortified by perpetual watchfulness. But is not this a grievous error? is it not to barter a precious birthright for a mess of pottage? is it not a strange dulness to our own true happiness? Where is the abhorrence we ought to feel for earthly pleasure, where the ever-growing aversion to all that flatters the senses? No wonder that so much

of excessive delicacy, of proud ambition, of unruly mind and heart prevails while we give way so much to the senses ! and while men fail to see that any harm is done so long as they stop short of actual crime.

§ 10. And here a few words may be said specially to those who, by vocation or self-dedication, are consecrated to God, and who aim at the delights of meditation and of the interior life.

I. Continually deny to your senses all that gratifies them, remembering what a Father has said, "you ought to be continually renouncing all consolations ;" or rather following the teaching of Holy Scripture, offer all that can please your senses to God, crying out, "Thou, O Lord, art my portion." Say this whenever you are tempted to delight in beautiful sights, delicious sounds or scents ; when natural inclination leads you to take satisfaction in delicate food rather than in such as is homely, or to indulge the flesh in soft apparel, in unnecessary sleep or warmth, or in a hundred other trivial matters wherein the body finds delight. Not that this is a precept of obligation, but it is most essential to those who would really enter into the sweetness of a close walk with God.

II. Guard all this by remembering that there are circumstances in which you may safely allow some innocent satisfaction to the senses ; as, for instance, when wearied and spent in body or mind, in which case some relaxation is both judicious and necessary to enable you

to serve God anew. Again, there are times when Christian courtesy demands some concession, so that you may not seem harsh and singular, or even when you ought to conceal your real mortification. Sometimes you may enjoy God's gifts out of a pure spirit of thankfulness to Him for having deigned to make such ample provision for all your bodily wants, seeing and loving Him in all that you enjoy. In these ways it is well at times not to refuse, or even to concede certain indulgences to the senses.

But nevertheless return to the first counsel. Be ever ready to deny yourself, and do not say in excuse that as God has made and given us all creation, it is our part to enjoy His gifts. Tertullian says, that in this God acts like a wise earthly Father who surrounds his children and servants with good things, which he expects them to use soberly, thereby proving their moderation and trustworthiness. Thus God leaves us a free discretion in using His gifts, but he who fears that his own weakness may betray him to use them unworthily, will do well to abstain entirely.

VII

Bodily austerities should be cautiously laid upon Penitents.

§ 1. **S**OME will say that this rule is contrary to the spirit of penitence, which demands that the body, chief accomplice of all our sins, should suffer for them, as also to the practice of all the saints, who have ever been pitiless in dealing with the flesh. But I would have you note that sometimes there is more real mortification to the penitent's will in forbidding such austerities than in permitting them; and while many saints have been great ascetics, there are also many who have glorified God no less pre-eminently without special asceticism. Not that you should for a moment join with those who say that spiritual mortification is all we need; this is a mere delusion of self-indulgence. But, on the other hand, it seems an error to look upon bodily inflictions as all-important, and make them an essential feature in direction. There is a middle course, which looks more to the working of God's grace in the penitent than to the mere guidance of a director.

Here let us remark that there are three classes of persons who are predisposed to bodily mortification:—

First, those who have sinned grievously, and who are kindled with a pious severity towards themselves by the recollection of past sin. But this is not common among

pure souls whose past lives have nothing to excite so intense a hatred towards their innocent bodies.

Secondly, people of an eager, excitable temperament, who are easily stirred to self-sacrifice ; and among these mortifications are often prompted rather by nature than grace, because they gratify self-will and pride.

Thirdly, persons who plunge into corporal austerities from a desire to imitate what they hear or read of the saints ; but these too, are in error, for surely it does not become such as we are to imitate all that we admire in the saints. God, Who permitted them to set forth His Glory in extraordinary austerity, gave them special grace and strength thereto ; but it does not follow that He will give the like to every self-willed person. Let everyone carefully ascertain what God would have him do, and follow the leadings of His Grace.

§ 2. It is not well, then, that the penitent be burdened with austerities. Let the director wait to see to what God's Holy Spirit moves him, according to his circumstances, his past sins, his health, and temperament. The director's part is not to lay heavy burdens and fetters upon the penitent ; in so doing, he may interfere with the workings of the Holy Spirit. His special office is to prune away all that is earthly and ill-regulated. In short, he ought to be only the instrument of direction, God's Holy Spirit being Himself the True Director, Who uses men as His delegates to souls.

Moreover, all are not equally able to bear physical austerity ; and it is a bad system which would subject everyone to the same treatment, whereby both body and soul may be injured ; for when health suffers people are led to give up all spiritual exercises ; to seek all manner of little self-indulgences with a view to regain health ; and, if they are members of a community, to give up their rules, and make use of various dispensations and privileges. All this, which serves the devil's cause, may be the result of the unwise handling of a severe director.

Then again, by imposing overmuch of these mortifications, you are apt to make people revolt against them. It is not uncommon to see those who have carried this point to excess, altogether take the opposite line, and shun every kind of self-denial, erring as much on the side of indulgence as before in indiscreet rigour. And if you would help people to persevere in the practice of austerities, you must keep up a desire for them by a judicious restraint. Moderation is generally most consistent with the true aim of all such exercises, which is to chasten the flesh. A fervent penitent who craves after corporal severities will gain more in real self-denial by being restrained than indulged therein, both because the will is sacrificed, and the heart grieved that it can do so little in expiation of sin. Another reason for being very reticent in permitting rigorous bodily exercises is, that some persons make a false standard of externals, and rely too much

upon such things. It is necessary to undeceive them, and deprive them of so false a stay, teaching them that, although holiness is fostered by self-denial, and her dealings with those she leads onwards are stern, yet she does not aim at mere destruction of the flesh. Lastly, experience proves that nothing has so strong a tendency to excite pride and self-complacency as indiscreet bodily mortifications. S. Cyprian says that when the body is emaciated by penance, the flesh often grows full with pride, the mind is poisoned with self-satisfaction, and delights in its own wretchedness. Men rest complacently in what they can see and touch, as though it were some great thing. Alas ! many a body, dried up with fasting, has been inhabited by a heart too proud to be acceptable before God ; and strong passions, self-will, and earthly clingings are to be found together with injudicious corporal authority. Let the wise director avoid setting overmuch value upon such practices. While shunning luxury and too great care for bodily ease, let us also beware of unduly exalting the virtue of austerity, esteeming a humble heart and a mortified spirit far more highly. Let us say with S. Cyprian, "I do not blame those who deal severely with their body, but the devil is apt to deceive such with many a wile, deluding them into a false impression of their own virtue ; so that, while yet groveling in manifold sins, they pass for holy in their own eyes and those of other men."

But how far, then, should the director permit bodily mortification?

§ 3. If the director ought not lightly to impose great austerities, at least, you will say, he may surely permit his penitent to undertake such as he himself desires? But here, again, sometimes you must forbid them absolutely; sometimes you may concede certain points, and at others you may grant all he asks.

I. You must forbid severities entirely in the case of weakness and delicate health, which make it difficult for the penitent to fulfil even his ordinary obligations—it is both indiscreet and imprudent to undertake what will militate against the due performance of a man's first duties.

II. When you perceive that a penitent's will is strongly set upon bodily austerities, it is well to suspend them for a time; such things assume an undue proportion with certain minds, in which case self-will and Satan are the conquerors. It is well to test the real motives and the humility of such persons by forbidding their favourite practices for a time.

III. It sometimes tends to stimulate the lax or sluggish to deprive them of these means of progress, and moves them to a wholesome shame for their slackness.

IV. There are some noble but rare souls who are helped onward by being checked in their aspirations, and their humility fostered by being esteemed unworthy of

offering such sacrifices to God. But these latter cases are rare, and need very judicious handling.

The reasons why you should concede what they ask to many, are,—

Because it is well to train the flesh to yield to the spirit, lest it gain the upper hand ; as also to keep up a devout mind, which is promoted by self-denial—a pampered body soon corrupts the spirit ; and, moreover, we all ought to be making continual satisfaction to Divine Justice, and that with the body as well as the soul. As to the cases in which you may consent to great austerities being practised, the penitent must be thoroughly strong and healthy, otherwise he will not be able to continue such exercises. But where this capacity exists in those whose past lives have been soiled by grievous sin, you may permit them to deal severely with the body, maintaining a perpetual attitude of repentance before God, both bodily and mental.

Or, again, if you perceive that God is evidently leading a soul through unusual ways, as has sometimes occurred amongst the saints, you may believe that He will give strength which weak nature unassisted cannot have.

Finally, although bodily mortifications are good when used with wise moderation, you must never forget that they ought not to be the first point in aiming at perfection, and that it is an error to exalt their importance too highly.

VIII

High-flown talk and the use of many mystical books should be checked.

§ 1. **T**HIS maxim will be unacceptable to vain, anxious, excitable aspirants after the spiritual life. But it is most important to check the misuse or abuse often made of high spiritual books and conversation.

There is a great deal of religious inquisitiveness among us. Of old, none meddled with these matters save those whose lives tallied with their talk; but now everybody tampers with spiritual subjects, not so much with a wish to practise them as for the sake of talking fluently. How many we see, living luxuriously amid all the comforts and vanities of the world, who affect to read the highest mystical books, and talk of the most exalted spiritual subjects, as though they were thoroughly at home in all such, and had them at their fingers' ends! But is it not almost a sort of sacrilege that holy things should be thus handled by those living sensual lives, and the language of the sanctuary profaned as idle talk? Again, we find really excellent people who discuss and comment freely upon the most solemn subjects, with a view to display their own wisdom. Everybody, women included, consider themselves able to weigh such matters, and to judge the

capacity of spiritual men by the warmth of their language. Consequently those who affect to put old truths in a new form, or to use many grandiloquent words, are taken to be the wisest and most spiritual, and religion is insulted by those who mishandle her truths.

Everybody discusses spiritual matters, some with real feeling and experience, others without any true knowledge or perception, and these will never impart any unction to those who listen. You may be sure that when you talk with a real man of God, the Divine Breath of God's Holy Spirit which inspires him, will come forth and impart its precious perfume to those who listen. But others who hold the same language, while their hearts are cold and dark, will always be mere tinkling cymbals, handling spiritual matters after a dry, speculative fashion, which can never reach the heart, however polished and eloquent their language.

§ 2. For all these reasons it is well to talk but little of exalted subjects with those under one's direction.

I. It is plain that if one feeds the mind with mysticism and mystic books, there is a danger of destroying lowliness and humility, and of leading the penitent whither God has not called him. It is not the director's part to constrain the soul to fly, his aim should be to strip it of whatever clogs and hinders it; God will call it to the mountain top, if and when He sees fit. But books and conversation of a tone beyond the penitent's capacity

are apt to make him aim at heights to which he is not called, thereby drawing him away from the simple, lowly paths in which God would have him walk.

II. Even if a person is destined to attain eminent perfection, it is quite possible for an injudicious director to hurry God's work unduly. Fruit ripens under a steady even heat, not by uncertain scorching blasts; and so the soul's perfection must be the work of time and patient nurture. One who is but a beginner and only opening his mind to spiritual things will be stifled by the attempt to grasp the elevated ideas thrust upon him by books and conversation beyond the power of his spiritual digestion. We see this continually in the case of persons who run after everything new that appears in the spiritual world, although their lives take a very different level.

III. Many people, especially women, are very ready to imagine that they possess all those interior graces of which they read, and imagination usurps the place of truth. Hence come illusions—mere excited fancies are mistaken for the operations of grace, and sometimes even directors themselves are deceived, and take that which stirs a soul to be Divine Grace when it is only a heated imagination, greatly to the detriment of that soul.

IV. Those who indulge much in such spiritual forcing are apt to despise commonplace solid goodness. They care only for great things, extraordinary graces, unusual ways, for the mysteries and rare secrets of meditation

and the hidden life. They will read none save mystical books, and run after everything new and exciting, affecting to discuss and criticise them.

V. It is easy to foster a belief in your penitent that he is something uncommon, that he has gifts and graces unlike other men. But, in truth, quiet simplicity is the true path to holiness, and it is far safer for souls to lead them on all unconscious of great gifts, if they have such. You will promote their sanctity far more by never leading them to suppose that they are treading other than the common paths. Indeed, a vain spiritual curiosity has deluded many, and led them to make shipwreck. Let us be content with a lowly aim, seeking nothing but abjection—let us look at Jesus lying in the manger, and read our lesson there, without seeking exciting books and fancies which may be brilliant, but are often wanting in simplicity and truth.

§ 3. This does not mean that the highest spiritual works are never to be given to those one directs, else to what end have so many great men written under the Holy Spirit's influence? But you should weigh carefully the circumstances which make such reading suitable to the soul you are guiding.

1. Examine whether he has a humble spirit ;—if so he will not be puffed up, but rather lowered in his own eyes by the thought of how far he is beneath the things he reads of or hears.

II. Take heed as to the natural temperament of your penitent, for if he has but little imagination, or that little be dull, he will not easily be over-excited ; on the contrary, his mind may be usefully roused and kindled by such books.

III. Ascertain whether God is leading him in special ways to which such books may be suitable, either as throwing light on his path, or consoling him under special pressure and trial.

IV. Above all, note whether he is simple-hearted and not disposed to self-consciousness. A well-grounded steadfast heart will be edified, without imagining itself capable of imitating all it may read of ; but those who seek great things waste their energies in vague aspirations after what seems to them grand or striking. High spirituality has become a mere fashion of the times, and while men use its language and admire its beauty, they too often neglect its practice.

IX

Some persons are incapable of the highest aims—how to distinguish and direct such as these.

§ 1. **T**HIS discrimination is necessary to avoid waste of time and misapplied efforts. Almost everybody wishes to fly high, and spiritual vanity tempts too many to aspire to a superficial holiness.

Everyone is not destined to be among the Seraphim, —among spiritual powers there are superiors and inferiors. Now, the difference among spiritual capacities depends upon what the degree of perfection to which God calls each of us in this world is, and just as God does not destine everyone to be of the seraphic host, so He does not call everyone to the same kind of perfection. To each He gives a capacity according to his calling. But for the most part those people who have very little spiritual capacity are the very persons who give most trouble to their directors, who are never satisfied with what is done for them, and always imagine that they might attain greater things. It is a great matter to deal wisely with such importunate persons, and to give them what they really need.

To this end we will consider three truths :

I. That grace rarely works miracles of perfection in souls, rather adapting itself to natural disposition, never constraining our liberty, and desiring all spiritual operations to be so simple and ordinary that its presence is scarcely detected.

II. There is nothing inherent in the creature which obliges God to raise it to any special perfection.

III. Granted these two facts, nevertheless God rarely calls any to be saints save those whose natural temperament is grand and generous. He leads the devoted man on to be an Apostle, the thoughtful man to be a contem-

plative, and the tender pitiful heart to accomplish great works of charity.

§ 11. How, then, are we to judge whether an individual has the requisite capacity for eminent perfection? We must carefully consider four points to this end.

1. Is he judicious, and has he good sense, so as to avoid the eccentricities and follies into which a want of judgment is apt to lead men?

2. Is his spiritual intelligence quick and penetrating, for many things in the spiritual life need a quick perception in order to follow God's leading, and the director's guidance?

3. Is he brave, for a generous heart, that will not shrink from the many difficulties which beset the paths of perfection, is necessary—and timid, cowardly hearts will fail?

4. Is he vigorous and healthy in body? Not but that the weakest bodies may be compatible with the highest holiness, but nevertheless experience proves that physical infirmity is a drawback, and vigour very important for the mortifications which may be necessary for a life of rule, for the numberless pious practices, and the interior training, which are often more exhausting to the flesh than the severest austerity. If the person whose treatment you are considering is deficient in all or most of these qualifications, he will be incapable of the higher paths of perfection, and it is most important to read

character aright, otherwise you will labour in vain, and do actual harm.

§ III. With those whose spiritual mind is narrow, it is well to be concise—they are generally inclined to be prolix and diffuse, and lengthy interviews are a mere idle waste of time. They will talk on about spiritual matters which they do not understand, or perhaps about all manner of ordinary things to fill up the time, and engross their director. Sometimes an over-indulgent director encourages this unduly. It is hard upon a different class of people if the director allows himself to be consumed by such as these, who are altogether of the world worldly, and who would not sacrifice one scrap of their finery or one social pleasure for all their professions. Evil reports and scandals may easily arise if a director allow such persons to take up over-much of his time; and it will soon be supposed that they seek him out of mere human friendship or secular motives. Moreover, if a director would really benefit such people, his intercourse with them should be brief; they are very prone to conceive violent attachments for their directors, and having little to do in themselves, and no inclination for the more heroic virtues, they soon pervert spiritual guidance into mere earthly friendship.

A wise director, however, will not discourage such penitents, or show any contempt for them. A wise and loving guide of souls must needs feel respect for all who

are under his direction. He will deal very patiently and kindly with them, leading them according to their capacity and giving heed not to repulse them, for such people are apt to be small-minded, sensitive, and proud, and ready to fancy themselves slighted. They must be led like children, who are encouraged to climb a hill by kind words and looks. If you can never get such people to the mountain top, at least you may keep them from vice while at its base. It is well to give them various exercises suited to their level, to keep them occupied with what is good, and turn them from useless pretensions to higher things which would be wholly unreal to them.

X

The penitent should trust to his Director's opinion rather than to his own, as to his spiritual progress.

§ 1. **T**HERE is a great deal of anxiety often felt by holy souls as to their progress. Such persons torment themselves uselessly, and turn the very blessings with which they are endowed into bitterness. There is a remedy for this common malady, and two considerations which will throw light upon the subject. You know that there is a holy impatience for greater nearness to God, greater perfection; the soul languishes under its yearnings, and sighs to be

transformed into His Likeness, for Whom it craves. This longing is the sole work of the Holy Spirit, and the test thereof is that such a soul is not disquieted or restless. He will not be for ever besieging his director with complaints of his own slackness, or with continually repeated queries and requests for fresh means of progress, nor will he want to change his director in order to try new plans. He rather mourns in holy silence, because he sees his own poverty, and realises what God claims at his hands.

On the other hand, we often see very unmortified impatience at the slowness of their progress in devout persons, to whom the same test may be applied. Their minds are always anxious and disturbed, and nothing one can say quiets them. They are a perpetual torment to their director, with the endless renewal of their perplexities, which are never appeased, and they forget all the remedies suggested to them, always beginning the old story over again.

The secret of all these ill-regulated desires after perfection is that self is at the bottom: these persons would fain be perfect for their own sake, their pride is wounded by the consciousness of their sin and weakness, and thence springs impatience. They want to see an immediate result of their efforts, and will not wait till patience obtains her "perfect work." They seek to rush headlong into the secrets of the hidden life, and have no

notion of waiting meekly in obscurity, till such time as it may please God to give them more light. Then they are disheartened by their falls, and the spectacle of their own faults casts them down, and it is in vain to set before them that this all arises from an unmortified will, and that holy gifts must be sought for in a quiet spirit; nothing calms their restless desire to examine into their own progress.

§ 11. But if you would really advance in the spiritual life strive to be at peace notwithstanding your ardent desire after perfection. Leave the whole question of progress to your director. Why should you pervert God's good seed into thorns and thistles? Why extract trouble and anxiety from the loving grace with which He fills your heart? It appertains to your director to watch over you and to note advance or backsliding in your spiritual course; your part is to obey simply and without questioning, in a calm peaceful spirit. A good director knows you better than you know yourself, and understands what you need far more readily; we cannot see ourselves so truly as another sees us. Trust to his sight rather than to your own blindness, and confess that you can see but a very little way. You are like a child beginning to walk, you need a guiding hand, lean upon the strong hand of experience, and do not be always fretting to know exactly your position in the spiritual life. God requires of you to labour after spiritual progress, but He never requires that you should

know what amount of progress you have made. You are like to the children of Israel, who were called to wander forty years in the wilderness, going whithersoever Moses bade them, though the extent of the ground over which they travelled was comparatively small. It may be your director's duty to make you travel often over the same ground—yours is to follow his bidding.

§ III. If you neglect this rule, you will have nothing save trouble and perplexity, and probably, if on the other hand you are satisfied that you are making good progress, that very satisfaction will undo the work ;—self-esteem is the poison of all holiness. Real detachment will put away all inclination to weigh your own merits, and true humility never perceives its own gifts ; it is only alive to its endless imperfections and faults. Be sure that all this restless self-dissection is merely a pretext for indulging pride and self-consciousness, and it can bear no good fruit, for no holy soul ever conceived itself to have made any great strides in goodness.

XI

The penitent should be generally reserved except with his Director.

§ 1. **I**T is not desirable to put any constraint upon you, and you are perfectly free to open your heart to whomsoever you are disposed. No wise director wishes to make slaves of those he guides, and total liberty in this respect is so important, that you should not be bound by a single word of restraint. But while the director bears this studiously in mind, the penitent on his part must remember that it is a serious evil for him to be running hither and thither, consulting this person and that, and a great hindrance to true spiritual progress.

It is a mistake to suppose that several different minds can direct a soul at one and the same time. The body is vivified by a single soul, a kingdom has but one king, the planets move round their own sun; and a conscience should be ruled by one director only. Each man has his own special way of seeing and treating things, his own peculiar language, and it is impossible to seek assistance from several, without confusion or embarrassment; not to say that practically by so doing a man becomes his own director, for of course he selects that which approves itself best to his own mind from the counsel of each whom he consults. Instead of submitting his will to a spiritual

guide, he practically subjects the opinion of several spiritual guides to his own judgment. But this is mere trifling with holy things, "abhorring the captivity of Christ," avoiding all restraint through the multitude of counsellors. With some people the inclination to seek various guides comes from their vanity, and disposition to talk of themselves. Such persons are never happy unless they are talking and writing of their own feelings and lights, but while making a great show of godliness, they are sadly far from the true spirit of mortification. With some the practice arises out of pure curiosity: they like to visit all who are remarkable in the devout world, and to hear what such men have to say—but it is needless to point out how unworthy this is, or how damaging to the real spiritual mind, when what should be done in earnestness and simplicity becomes a mere fashion, an amusement instead of a means of spiritual progress.

§ 11. But after all, you will say, is there no case in which I may leave my usual director and seek other help? Certainly, it were mere slavery else. You are justified in changing if experience proves that in spite of your own care and earnestness you make no progress under your existing director, which may arise from his not giving sufficient attention to the case, from his being too easy and indulgent, or from his lack of necessary skill in direction.

Again, it is right to seek a fresh channel of help, if you

are sure that another director has deeper understanding in the things of God. Why should you not be free to get the best help you can attain? or is there anything in the world in which liberty of action is more essential? In so weighty a matter, in which every minor consideration should be put away, act as you believe conscientiously to be right, and never let human respect make you a slave to any director. Well for you, if you can be enslaved by the Spirit of Grace.

Again, if you feel a quiet but strong and lasting attraction to seek some special help, so that it is clearly God's Voice within you, then follow His Leading. He not unfrequently puts a soul under a particular guide for a time only, and then in the course of His Divine Providence He leads that soul to some other director, more suitable to its existing wants. Sometimes delicate and difficult complications will arise, in which other assistance becomes necessary. In such a case it is well to do nothing without receiving permission to seek other guidance from your director, nor need you quit him altogether because in a special point you need special advice.

XII

The Director is specially bound to maintain close union with God, during his intercourse with souls.

§ 1. ONE cannot help sometimes asking oneself why it so often happens that directors make so little impression on the souls they guide, for while on the one hand a great deal of direction is sought and given, on the other we do not see a very large number of persons advancing rapidly under such guidance. Of course one does not wonder at this where time is spent in mere idle, useless talk, but it is a matter of surprise in the case of good and holy directors, whose guidance, one is apt to think, ought to make all those they direct, saints. But it is not so; and amid the most edifying spiritual intercourse, many souls make no progress, even among those who are capable of very great things.

Perhaps we need go but a little way to find out the cause of all this, namely, that the director speaks too much with human utterance, from his own ideas and reasons, drawing upon his own light, whereas no Divine results can be produced upon souls while their guide draws his strength from an earthly source. He may speak the words of wisdom and philosophy, he may be a most excellent man, but with all that he will not be able to raise souls from their earthliness. Be sure that in all his deal-

ings with souls, the director must abide in close inward union with God, so that it be not man who speaks and decides, but God's Holy Spirit Alone Which prompts all he says. Then indeed, the consciences which are laid bare to him will receive the grace of that Divine Guidance which penetrates them through his means.

So imperative is this duty in a director that we must not hesitate to say, through neglecting it he perils his own soul as well as the souls of those under his guidance,

A Director who neglects recollection and union with God, readily loses his own soul.

§ II. Consider how such neglect causes the priest to forget his due position—the result of which is that he becomes much like the men of the world around him. He adopts the world's maxims, valuing that which is great, brilliant, and worldly-wise above all else : his conversation becomes like that of worldly men—the news of the day, politics, the gossip of club and drawing-room ; his tastes become secular, his pleasures and satisfactions all turn the same way. Such is sure to be the result in a director who does not strive through all his intercourse with souls to keep his own heart in stedfast recollection and union with God. It springs from two causes ;—natural inclination and pressure from the world without. Nature inclines us all to be inquisitive, to like to know what is going on, to hear and ask for news. Nature's maxims are diametrically opposed to those of the Cross ; she heeds only that which

appeals to the senses ; she recoils from an interior, restrained, mortified life, because it is destruction to herself. And if the director lacks such within him, he must inevitably fall into what is the simply natural course. Add to this the pressure from the outer world, which knows no wisdom save that which is secular and earthly. Everything conspires to make the unrecollected director become secularized in his dealings with souls. But how far otherwise it is with him who is interior and recollected. He never adopts the thoughts and maxims of the world, he is firm and self-possessed, because his heart is continually moulded by the Holy Spirit of God, and being thus always collected and staid, he is always content, always united to God. Consequently he does not trouble himself about the endless worldly matters which excite curiosity ; he has a power of edifying and sanctifying the most secular or even profane of those who seek him, while they do him no harm because they have simply no attraction for him. Such a man will never be secularized by any amount of intercourse with others.

§ III. But for want of such recollection, the director's own conscience will suffer from contact with his fellow-men. He will be easily impressed by what he sees and hears, and his imagination will be kindled through that to which he readily opens his senses. When, however, a man closes his senses to that which he sees and hears, no abiding impression is made, just as we find to be the case with those

whom we call absent in mind. A director who for lack of recollection throws himself into all that surrounds him, loses his inward self-control, and hence arise hindrances in prayer, difficulty in self-examination, and a sense of helplessness in shaking off the memory of things he has seen and heard, when he would fain not be troubled by them. On the contrary, he who keeps close to God, and watches over his own heart through all intercourse with men, only sees and hears as much as is absolutely necessary, and he comes forth from such contact with sin and frivolity in an undisturbed spirit, free from contamination; his prayers and meditations are untroubled, the clear light of his soul unshadowed.

§ IV. Another evil of insufficient recollection is that the director is very easily led to form undue attachments to individuals, when he sees them, talks to them, and thinks of them save as in God. It is but natural that our hearts cleave to human ties; we cannot fail to do so unless we cleave to and are united to God. Moreover, the confidence reposed in us leads naturally to closer attachment, affection felt for anyone seldom fails to beget affection, and thus many evils have arisen through a loss of recollection and too great expansiveness. He who is gathered up as it were in God through all his intercourse with men and women, will never be liable thus to form unwise attachments to the creature. Besides, nothing so tends to preserve his own purity of heart, which, as aforesaid, is

often perilled by his needful work, or to keep alive a sensitive conscience, and freedom from worldliness.

The unrecollected Director perils the souls he guides as well as his own.

§ v. Nor is the evil of deficient recollection confined to the director himself. The complication extends to those whom God has committed to his care. He hinders their perfection, thereby interfering with God's decrees, for his words have necessarily a great weight with those he guides, and if his own soul is unrecollected, not in close union with God, poured out in idle distractions and effusions, his words will not be of God. How can he speak of the things he neither knows or understands, or who can wonder that his discourse turns more readily upon trivial secular matters, than upon those which rightly pertain to his office?

§ vi. Again, the unrecollected director perils souls, because he does not know how to touch them. If reading, or a lively imagination, or fluency of speech enable him to speak forcibly and well concerning the things of God, nevertheless he will not be able to reach hearts by his words, so as to drag them out of the depths of sin, or urge them forward in ways of holiness. He will speak of God, but it will be in the speculative tone of one who has not won his knowledge by personal experience. His words will come rather from head than heart, and though the head may convince heads, the heart alone can reach

hearts—nor can a heart itself devoid of God's softening Grace, convey that healing balm into the souls of other men. Or you may take a still higher ground, and say that as it is God's peculiar right to touch the heart, and the priest can only hope to do so as His instrument, it is vain to look for any such results from one whose own heart is not united to God, but whose thoughts are dissipated and estranged from his true aim. Moreover the unrecollected director will soon come to a standstill, and find that he has nothing to say of the things of God. No one can go on long speaking earnestly of that in which he feels no real interest; it is a mere form or effort. But he whose inner life is centred in God finds the way to men's hearts; everything he says is spoken as in God's hearing, and thereby gains earnestness and unction—God is present with him, puts thoughts into his heart and words into his mouth; so that the genuine warmth of his own convictions, together with the Divine Co-operation, combine to give him a mighty power of impressing those who listen.

§ VII. Once more, the director who lacks recollection hinders souls by too often sending them away the reverse of edified by what he has said. If a man becomes secular with men of the world, if his talk is like their own, rather than of high and holy things, they will inevitably be lowered by such intercourse, which tends to efface their better impressions. He who never loses sight of God's Presence, on the contrary, edifies all who come near him. Never for-

getting what is due to his priestly office, he recalls what Tertullian says, *i. e.* that there is great benefit and grace in the priest's garb, because the mere sight of it is a check upon all unseemliness and disorder.

It is a fearful thought that a man may be following a profession which will lose his own soul, or at least may greatly hinder his perfection ; that he may be professing to lead other men to holiness, and neglecting to do the like for himself. Think of the terrible account such a man will have to give for the souls committed to him by God, and whose spiritual interests, perhaps their very salvation, have been hindered by his fault ! God may have destined souls to be saved and perfected by his dealing, and if, through lack of recollection and union with God, he has failed to do so, will they not rise up and reproach him bitterly at the Last Judgment ? Think how many souls may already be lost, because those whose office it was to guide them did not sufficiently urge God's truths upon them ! Every interview a director has with a penitent is an additional responsibility before God, a fresh obligation to win another soul for God. It is a debt which he owes to God, and he must give account both for himself and the penitent. It is impossible to say too urgently to all whom it concerns, that the director who does not diligently strive after recollection and union with God, perils alike his own soul, and those which are entrusted to his care.

BOOK II

Maxims for those who are advanced in the Spiritual Life

I

*Recollection is an Absolute Necessity to the Spiritual Life.
What Recollection is.*

§ 1. **R**ECOLLECTION is so imperative a necessity of the spiritual life, that we shall do well to consider it very attentively. We need not wonder to see so many souls lagging in their way to perfection, when we find how comparatively few directors make a special point of training their penitents in a spirit of recollection. We often find a system of religious exercises, including many observances, penances, frequent communions, and meditation urgently enjoined, all of which are admirable in themselves doubtless, while yet some become mere forms, and the others lose all their essential grace from not being rightly approached. Surely recollection is the very essence of holiness, the corner stone of perfection, which opens every access to grace, and which, while it subdues and

enthral the mind, is its only true liberty. It is embodied in S. Peter's words, "That ye might be partakers of the divine nature, . . . giving all diligence, adding to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter, i. 4-8.).

Let us inquire more closely what the true character of recollection is, its importance and its benefits. We may define it as an interior self-possession of the heart through detachment from all created things. There is an external as well as an interior recollection.

§ II. External recollection consists, 1st. In silence; for much talk disturbs the stillness and devotion of the heart; therefore a recollected man shuns it in order rather to approach God than men in his daily life. And in his necessary conversation he strives to avoid superfluity of words, uncalled-for words, and as far as possible he makes all his conversation turn upon the things of God, wherein his heart delights.

2. In solitude; for the spiritual mind knows that he who would find the Creator must forsake the creature. So he avoids ordinary society, secular visits, and the like, as hidden rocks on which he fears to make shipwreck,

and gladly flies from earthly companionship to seek that of God. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence," as the prophet Jeremiah says. (Lam. iii. 28.) He goes forth from his retreat like as Noah's dove went forth from the ark, and that only when courtesy and kindness require it. But however dear that solitude, the spiritually-minded man obeys the summons of charity or of God's service readily—it is not so dear to him as obedience to Christ's call. Exterior recollection may be fitly defined as a separation from all that is extraneous to the soul's concerns, all wherein a man does not find his one only object, God.

§ III. In order to succeed in effecting this separation, whereby that great end is obtained, a wise man limits his occupations and pursuits, avoiding excessive entanglement in worldly affairs, and especially keeping himself from needless meddling in those of other men. People who are inquisitive and restless, mixing themselves up in a hundred things which do not concern them, will never find God Alone, for the very reason that they have no singleness of purpose, and are never alone, so to say, themselves. He who is earnest in the spiritual life will keep clear of all engrossing cares beyond such as have a rightful claim upon him, in order to dwell, as far as possible, alone with God.

Again, such an one will close his ears, as far as may be, to the clatter and gossip of the world, which haunts and hinders the mind, and rises up as a dark cloud between the

soul and that clear perception of heavenly things which is the truest happiness of this life. And in the same spirit he will put away all superfluities, and strive to lead a life as detached from earthly comforts and pleasures as he can accomplish. This is what is meant by exterior recollection.

§ IV. Interior recollection is a higher and more advanced stage. It implies, 1st. Closing the senses to all merely human objects, so as not to be liable to vain distractions. 2nd. A continual attentive effort to seek and behold God within the soul, where He deigns to dwell. 3rd. Watchfulness always to maintain holy thoughts, lest idle, dangerous, or sinful thoughts intrude. It is this interior recollection that we must now consider,—inasmuch as no one who really aims at giving himself wholly to God, can need to be convinced of the importance of silence, solitude, and disentanglement from worldly affairs, as means of promoting a closer union with Him. He who does not realize this, cannot be said to have made the first steps towards an interior life.

§ V. We must not stop short in a definition—we must inquire what are the essential qualities of interior recollection, and in what ways it is most liable to suffer. Its essential qualities then are—

1st. Its predominance—that is to say, however many or absorbing a man's duties or engagements may be, his heart and mind must be recollected, and gathered to one centre. Whatever your occupation is your heart should be

fixed there, and while giving your mind and faculties to your work, that recollection should but be the firmer, in proportion as you diligently fulfil it. No hurry or multitude of duties ought to have power to draw you from out this inner fortress.

2nd. Calmness of mind—a peaceful sea wherein no wild winds rage. Recollection has the power of stilling the whole soul; it is in Isaiah's words "as rivers of waters in a dry place, a hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isaiah xxxii. 2.) Earthly cares cannot greatly move him who possesses it, so long as he is watchful not to forfeit it by his own carelessness.

3rd. Perseverance, for if the door be opened, the captive will fly, and unruly nature takes her way, and wanders hither and thither so soon as she escapes from the strict custody of recollection. Where there is no continuity, a moment's dissipation suffices to pull down what it had taken long hours to build up.

§ VI. Of course it is the converse of all this which destroys recollection. Wandering forth from steadfast watchfulness either in conversation, in natural liveliness or recreation, you forthwith banish recollection, which is a sober thing, the foe of all levity and frivolity. So again, over-eagerness and hurry in external things, whether in action or expression, disturb that most sensitive grace, and all deliberate faults or indulged imperfections necessarily distract the

conscience and upset recollection. It is not so with unintentional faults of infirmity, after which a humble spirit is able to recollect itself without losing its place. These dangers must be carefully guarded against by him who would attain the heavenly spirit of recollection, and duly weighing them, we can hardly wonder if so many people fail to attain, giving way, as we all do, to earthly and sensual impulses, to the eager pursuit of all we do, or all we care for, as also the many faults we commit rather through consent of the will than the unavoidable infirmity of our nature.

Further, let us consider, 1st, the necessity of recollection ; 2nd, its active side ; 3rd, its difficulties ; 4th, the chastisements with which God visits the unrecollected soul ; and 5th, the blessings of recollection.

§ VII. The necessity of Recollection.

Everyone grants that prayer, self-denial, and self-knowledge are absolutely necessary to the Christian life, much more to those who aim at drawing still nearer to God by a higher, holier devotion. And as no one can grow holy without prayer, self-denial, and self-knowledge, any more than they can attain an end without its means, so neither can anyone acquire those graces without recollection.

As to prayer, what is more common than to find good, well-meaning people who set about it altogether in a mistaken way ? How many we see who are for ever asking their directors for systems and methods of devotion, as

though prayer and meditation could be learnt like a handicraft by formal rules, the performance of which necessarily ensures a fixed result? Such persons fall into the great error of fancying that they will make progress in the grace of prayer while they yield to the inclination of their senses, and give way unrestrainedly to all their likings and tempers. It may be that prescribed methods and plans only foster such mistakes, by giving a false prop on which they lean. The truth is that in order to pray well a man must accustom himself to live all the day in familiar intercourse with God, or he will not be able to draw near to Him in the season of special intimacy offered by prayer. How can a heart which has wandered abroad in every kind of dissipation through twenty-three hours, suddenly turn at the twenty-fourth to the most close and private intercourse with God? It is mere delusion and temerity to suppose such a thing possible. There must be a reaching forth of the heart to God all day long, if you would find Him and rest in Him when your season for meditation comes. You cannot do well at one hour what is opposed to all you have been doing till that moment arrives. Then, too, you require a clear tranquil imagination, free from that restless crowd of fancies and pictures which come between you and the truths God's Holy Spirit is ready to impress upon the prepared heart. And thirdly, a perfectly pure heart is required, for how can you attain the great aim of prayer, union with God, without purity

of heart? But no plans or methods will ever enable one of a heedless, dissipated, self-indulgent habit to make progress in the gift of prayer. Such a habit unfits a man for it, and the most practical, careful director cannot teach him to pray till this is amended. So it is that many well-meaning persons go on complaining all their lives that they cannot draw near to God in prayer. The truth is that nothing save recollection enables us to pray rightly. By it the senses and faculties are gathered in all through the day, and the mind turned to God, so that a recollected man does not enter upon a new occupation when he begins his meditation—it is practically but the continuation of all that he has been doing already. Great is the blessing and the expansion of such a soul! Again, recollection banishes all the wayward thoughts and fancies which are the torment of our prayers; its special office is to set aside all such, to fix the heart on God, and to keep it undisturbed in His Presence. If the mind be thus clear and shadowless it will be ready to speak with God. Finally, recollection purifies the heart. Its watchful eye detects the slightest unholy strivings of nature, rooting them out before they have time to grow, and thus the heart is prepared for union with God. It is not too much to say that the one real preparation for prayer is constant recollection.

§ VIII. The second essential to a Christian's life is self-denial or mortification. But no one can be truly dead to

self without recollection. An exterior, unrecollected man is incapable thereof. A mortified spirit implies incessant watchfulness and circumspection, lest the enemy overtake and surprise us: it implies habitual self-abhorrence, but he who lets his mind wander abroad under the influence of the senses, does not know what that means. On the other hand, a recollected mind is ever on its guard to deny itself those ordinary indulgences of the senses to which inclination perpetually tends; keenly alive to his own weakness and wretchedness, he does not spare himself, but seeks on all occasions to die to the flesh, and to put away everything which may be a source of temptation. There can be no steady self-denial without constant recollection.

§ IX. The third essential to a Christian life is self-knowledge, and without recollection this cannot be attained. The motives of man's heart are exceeding subtle and secret, and it requires a very enlightened watchfulness, constantly maintained, to acquire any due knowledge of them; how can he whose mind is ever wandering forth to all that surrounds him gain such knowledge? Self-knowledge is a weary, unpleasant task, from which we are easily turned aside; it requires patience, thought, discrimination, and how can he who never dwells within himself, never fixes his mind stedfastly, employ such means?

But recollection teaches us to fathom our heart, to discover its secret springs—it is as a mirror wherein we see ourselves, and in which every breath of earthliness tells.

S. Paul says, "what man knoweth the things of God, save the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Cor. ii. 11.) It is the inner man which both reads the things of God and the secrets of his own heart. Moreover, those who have ever enjoyed this recollected spirit, find it hard to go forth from it, for there is a deep sense of peace and happiness in recollection, and in the stillness and purity which attend it. Further, it quickens all reflection and discernment; every recollected person will be thoughtful. This habit throws light upon the source of our passions and the grace which counteracts them, their nature and motives, their progress and their restraint. It is through recollection that we may hope to learn the science of the saints, and to approach God's wondrous dealings with men and nature.

There can be no thorough self-knowledge without recollection.

§ x. The active side of Recollection.

Having satisfied ourselves as to the imperative necessity of recollection, let us guard against a difficulty which often meets us,—that of persons who desire to be recollected, and take delight therein, but who do not understand how to exercise it rightly. For it is important to remember that it is easy to let recollection degenerate into indolence and dreaming, which may end in disheartening one irretrievably. Some people think they have done all that is required when they have made a pretence of

gathering themselves together inwardly, yet this may be mere sloth. They talk of simple contemplation and the like, but it is all mere verbiage, tending only to trifling and self-complacency. Simple contemplation is all very well for those favoured souls who have made great progress in their spiritual life, but those who are only acquiring a habit of recollection need something practical and substantial, if they would keep clear of unreality. Otherwise the imagination becomes a prey to numberless extravagances, and the understanding a mere sieve through which all manner of vague thoughts, good and bad, pass indiscriminately. The various passions to which we are subject play upon the will, and unruly inclinations make an unresisted impression on the heart. Nothing can be more dangerous than to indulge the mental powers in idleness and wandering. There are two ways in which this may be remedied—one suitable to those beginning to aim at a recollected life, the other better adapted to those who have made some advance therein.

§ XI. Those who come under the first head will find it helpful always to occupy heart and head with the thought of Jesus Christ in some one of His mysteries; whether as a Child, as Man, in His Agony, at the pillar of scourging, or the Cross, or whichever may help them best. Let the heart continually dwell, the soul ever return to the recollection of this amid whatever external occupation arises, and let this be the point on which it is fixed, so as

to prevent desultory idle wanderings. There is no thought so calculated to arrest and subdue a wild flighty imagination as that of the Holy Manhood of Jesus ; there is grace in the mere passing glance thereat ; and nothing can tend better to help beginners in the spiritual life to frame their own lives upon that adorable Example. Even as a painter fixes his eyes upon the picture he copies, so the recollected soul fixes a longing gaze upon Jesus, striving to copy Him in purity, meekness, and love of God.

Again, a recollected soul may dwell upon Him as Bridegroom, Friend, King, or from whatever point of view best tends to quicken his devotion. In this way, without any strain, his recollection is built upon the Blessed Likeness of Jesus, and It always fills his heart : just as the engraver traces the lines of a picture with his clear, sharp-edged tools, so this constant thought engraves Jesus on the heart, and the longer and more steadfastly men gaze upon Him, the clearer the impression will become. No one else can attempt to map out the intercourse between your heart and Jesus ; that must be left to your own choice, according as the various characteristics of His Sacred Humanity draw you. There should be no constraint in such dealings, the best system is that which rises spontaneously from a heart pierced and softened with love for Him on Whom it gazes. Combined with this interior gazing upon Jesus as the Centre point, must be a continual effort to combat and mortify the

passions,—nay more, an attempt to root out all mere earthly natural movements, for the very essence of recollection is the retrenchment of earthliness, and the captivity of all one's being to grace. One might define the spirit of recollection as the grave of nature, or the sword ever ready to sacrifice earthly liberty.

§ XII. As to those who have already made progress in the habit of recollection, let them, 1st. Strive to attain greater simplicity in the inward occupation of their heart. Do not aim at too much; remain in respectful silence, waiting for God to speak. 2nd. Cultivate the most diligent fidelity in following the movements of Grace aroused by such recollection; it is its peculiar characteristic to open your eyes to read the mirror of the heart, to hear the Voice of God's Holy Spirit within the conscience. And, 3rd. Strive watchfully to put away every imperfection, however slight, mounting guard over the avenues of the heart while it abides in simple waiting upon its God. How sadly prone we are to hamper our intercourse with Him by our own human complications, or our over-eagerness and impatience, and yet purity and simplicity are of more importance in that converse than all our activity.

Sometimes an impression made in our morning meditation will keep the mind in a recollected attitude all the day; but however that may be, recollection depends rather upon what God puts within us than upon ourselves, and a recollected soul strives to avoid clinging to

lights, feelings, consolations, or whatever may be self-love, preferring that spiritual poverty of which the Gospel tells us, and which causes the soul to be always more absorbed in God than in itself.

§ XIII. There are a few rules which may help those who seek to cultivate a spirit of recollection.

1. Sometimes God Himself gathers together and binds the soul by the operation of His Holy Spirit, without any effort on its own part. So upheld, it is easy to abide, but when God withdraws His conscious support, that soul needs very special watchfulness, especially when the senses are quick and lively. It is easy for the spirit of recollection to evaporate and vanish.

2. Remember that this is a very delicate treasure, hardly acquired and easily lost;—a passing act of levity, a worldly action, a voluntary carelessness, drive it so far away as not to be readily won back, and the heart which had been so sweetly absorbed in God, is laid bare to the assaults of innumerable wild fancies.

3. Do not harass yourself with a constant conscious effort to be recollected; it is not well to be always lying in ambush to pounce upon some passing motion of nature or of passion, or, on the other hand, some whisper of grace. All this is a bondage inconsistent with the Spirit of God, Which is liberty. It suffices if you are recollected within yourself by some holy thought, if you are ready to check the motions of earthly passion as they

arise, and to follow all those with which the Holy Spirit may inspire you.

4. If in such recollection God gives you but little food for thought, or if your own capacity is small, be humble and contented, without seeking more ; cherish your poverty, and bethink you that it is sufficient for you to be God's captive.

5. Never, therefore, make violent efforts, or strain your mind to do more ; the discomfort you will experience in so doing is sufficient proof that this is an indiscretion, and that you are seeking to outstep God's Will. There is not one uniform standard of recollection for all men ; if yours be but low, accept it humbly, and do not strive to snatch at what is beyond you.

The difficulties of recollection :—

§ XIV. In spite of all that can be said to assist the practice of recollection, it will always have its own trials and difficulties, which lead many to give up the attempt. This is chiefly because men will seek for light, sweetness, and tangible satisfaction therein, whereas often they do but find trouble and bitterness, and the consequence is that they draw back and shun the inner depths of conscience as a place of torment or a court of justice, where they feel themselves continually occupying the position of a criminal. Let us consider what these troubles are, and how to lighten them.

Sometimes God keeps a profound silence, and the

heart realizes His absence so intensely that it knows not where to turn. If it strives, forsaking the creature, to turn in upon itself, all is but as a desert; it cries out in loving, sorrowful accents to God, and He answers not; it seeks to draw near to Him in lowliness and faithful adoration, but still He seems at an immeasurable distance. At other times, although the recollected soul feels that God is near, it is with such a sense of coldness that he is ready to cry out in the psalmist's words: "Who is able to abide His frost?" (Ps. cxlvii. 17.) He feels as though God were all severity, unapproachable by his sighs and tears. Or again, amid deep recollection, the remembrance of past sin, the most humiliating memories, the most overwhelming fears, will sometimes sweep over a soul, and it seems as though the practical result of recollection were merely to plunge him into a bitterness little short of hell itself! Another trial is when fondly imagining that, drawing close to God in recollection, all our prayers will be forthwith granted, we pour ourselves out to Him, and find Him, as it seems to us, deaf to our entreaties.

All these various forms of trial are apt to harass recollection, and hence spring weariness, revulsion of spirit, loss of stedfastness, falling aside to seek outward consolations; and so there are but few who, withstanding all such troubles, abide faithfully in the practice of recollection. There is much to dishearten a soul, but nevertheless

though prayer and meditation could be learnt like a handicraft by formal rules, the performance of which necessarily ensures a fixed result? Such persons fall into the great error of fancying that they will make progress in the grace of prayer while they yield to the inclination of their senses, and give way unrestrainedly to all their likings and tempers. It may be that prescribed methods and plans only foster such mistakes, by giving a false prop on which they lean. The truth is that in order to pray well a man must accustom himself to live all the day in familiar intercourse with God, or he will not be able to draw near to Him in the season of special intimacy offered by prayer. How can a heart which has wandered abroad in every kind of dissipation through twenty-three hours, suddenly turn at the twenty-fourth to the most close and private intercourse with God? It is mere delusion and temerity to suppose such a thing possible. There must be a reaching forth of the heart to God all day long, if you would find Him and rest in Him when your season for meditation comes. You cannot do well at one hour what is opposed to all you have been doing till that moment arrives. Then, too, you require a clear tranquil imagination, free from that restless crowd of fancies and pictures which come between you and the truths God's Holy Spirit is ready to impress upon the prepared heart. And thirdly, a perfectly pure heart is required, for how can you attain the great aim of prayer, union with God, without purity

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§ IX. The third essential to a Christian life is self-knowledge, and without recollection this cannot be attained. The motives of man's heart are exceeding subtle and secret, and it requires a very enlightened watchfulness, constantly maintained, to acquire any due knowledge of them; how can he whose mind is ever wandering forth to all that surrounds him gain such knowledge? Self-knowledge is a weary, unpleasant task, from which we are easily turned aside; it requires patience, thought, discrimination, and how can he who never dwells within himself, never fixes his mind stedfastly, employ such means?

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§ x. The active side of Recollection.

Having satisfied ourselves as to the imperative necessity of recollection, let us guard against a difficulty which often meets us,—that of persons who desire to be recollected, and take delight therein, but who do not understand how to exercise it rightly. For it is important to remember that it is easy to let recollection degenerate into indolence and dreaming, which may end in disheartening one irretrievably. Some people think they have done all that is required when they have made a pretence of

§ XVIII. The branch, once cut off from its parent vine, dries up and is withered. Even so God punishes the unrecollected soul. And this second chastisement is far more severe than the first, because that withering implies the loss of all taste for heavenly things : “*Et arescet.*” God is wont to pour forth the unction of His Spirit in meditation, communion, and other religious exercises upon the recollected soul, which is prepared to receive it, inasmuch as recollection closes the avenues to earthly things, and opens the access to God, and His uninterrupted communications. But the unrecollected man finds naught save discomfort in that which should be his greatest happiness ; he enters wearily upon his duties, they are vapid or even painful to him—all around is weariness, dryness, bitterness : “*Et arescet.*”

There is no need to ask why this should be ? Why does the severed tendril wither ? Because it is separated from the parent vine-stock whence it derived life and vigour. Even so the unrecollected soul is severed from the root whence all living sap flows, and the principle of life is gone from it. Recollection is as the fibres which unite the soul to God and Christ the Mystic Vine ; as the channel whence life-giving moisture flows into the soul, and where it fails, devotion, warmth, freshness inevitably fail, the soul dries up and withers away.

§ XIX. The withered branches are gathered and bound up in fagots—this is the third punishment which God

imposes on the dissipated soul. "Et colligent eam." It is bound, enchained by the sensual pleasures and the evil spirits to which it has yielded itself. Such a heart, says a father, wanders abroad so far that it becomes a prey to its worst enemies, and has no longer any power to return. An evil habit indulged soon becomes a sort of terrible necessity, to which he who yields to it is captive; and when the devil sees that a man is no longer God's subject, he loses no time in making him his slave. "Et colligent eum." Too often the person who has fallen thus, makes but feeble efforts of will to break his chains: at times he realizes his pitiable condition, and resolves to set himself free, but human respect and earthliness drag him back. Or again, certain seasons of grace and retirement press the sense of his woeful condition upon him, but the strength of evil habits overpowers his better mind, and sweeps away his good resolutions. It may be that he makes some last efforts to regain those habits of recollection and holiness which he has lost; but his tears and sighs are selfish, they do not take their spring from love of God, and there comes a time, says S. Gregory Nazianzen, when the Long-suffering God, Who has been so long rejected, will reject the prayer of him who has voluntarily rejected His Grace.

§ xx. The withered branches are bound up, and men cast them into the fire: "Et in ignem mittent et ardent." They are fit for nothing else than the fire of passion and

of temptation which they have kindled for themselves by lack of steadfastness and recollection.

The vine branch has but two alternatives, says S. Augustine, it must either be united to its parent vine-stock, or it must be burnt, for as wood it is worthless:—Union or the fire. Even so, he goes on to say, with the Christian, he must be united to Jesus Christ or cast into the fire; unless the spirit of recollection binds him to his Source, he will be burnt up by the flames of passion. How many have experienced it, after giving way to evil thoughts, and what guide of souls but has sorrowfully watched the downward course of those who will not strive to win a recollected mind? Consider how the first beginnings lead on to the whole chain of evils; and, as Origen says, let painful experience teach you before it is too late by diligent self-examination and fervent prayer to return to the haven of your rest in renewed captivity to the law of Christ.


§ XXI. The blessings of recollection :—

Those who have tasted thereof know how hard they are to paint, and those who have not striven to share therein will deem it exaggeration. But, in truth, the blessings of recollection outweigh its difficulties; nevertheless, they are hidden, and must be sought for in the hidden recesses of the heart. Gather yourself together therein, and consider the two main sources of that sweetness and joy, in which “the stranger intermeddled not.”

And, first we find how each of those difficulties and trials of which we spoke, is turned into a blessing. God's temporary silence is more than made up for by the joy of His returning favours, His blessed Presence, His gracious familiarity. And, in very truth, none can imagine without experience, how graciously familiar His intercourse with the soul is in the secret communing of the heart. He speaks often and lovingly to the devout conscience. He chastens it with tender severity; like Moses on the Mount, hidden amid the clouds and darkness, the soul is utterly alone with God. It cries out with the Bride of the Canticles, "Let me see Thy countenance, let me hear Thy voice; for sweet is Thy voice, and comely is Thy countenance." (Cant. ii. 14.) When He says to it as He said to the apostles, "It is I," the whole soul is filled to overflowing with peace, joy, and happiness.

Another trial is the seeming coldness and indifference with which God treats the soul. But who can venture to describe the tenderness of His caresses, the abundance of His gifts, when He turns His gracious favour anew upon His child? To be alone with Him, and He lavishing forth the treasures of His Love,—what joy!

Again, the bitter memories of past sin,—God wipes them out for ever. "Fear not, thou shalt not be ashamed, neither shalt thou be confounded, for thou shalt not be put to shame, for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth." (Isaiah liv. 4.) He restores former innocence,



and in spite of past sin and justice, the soul draws near to Him as a bride to her loving bridegroom, remembering former sins but as tokens of His forgiving Love.

Another trial is God's apparent delay in answering prayer ; but the soul which has borne this in calm, trustful patience, will receive more than compensation. God goes beforehand to hear and answer all its desires, says S. Augustine. He who has tasted this blessing of recollection, knows well what it is to feel Him ever at hand, inseparable.

§ XXII. The second source of blessing to a recollected soul is the abundant share it has in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The recollected man has the spirit of wisdom, for he is perpetually reading the book of conscience, wherein God speaks, and wherein He writes, "not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God." (2 Cor. iii. 3.) "God giveth to a man that is good in His Sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." (Eccles. ii. 26.) For this reason it is that we see men who have not studied deeply, and who yet speak with the tongue of angels concerning spiritual things ; recollection being to them a divine school in which the Holy Spirit is Himself their Master, opening to them His hidden secrets, the treasures of grace and the wonders of nature. Such men are very accessible to whatever appertains to God ; it may be something they read, or a passing word, or the mere tone of a voice, which fills their hearts with fervour. Continual recollec-

tion keeps the heart ever strung to heavenly things, just as a musical instrument sends forth tones, strike it when you will. The recollected soul is perpetually tending towards God, and every ordinary voice of nature which greets his ear, every book he reads, strikes a chord of harmony which draws him nearer to his God. Such a man dreads every shadow of human imperfection, by reason of the exceeding sensitiveness of conscience, which such perpetual recollection produces. It is marvellous how the faintest indication of evil grieves him; hence that crystal-like purity which is inseparable from a recollected soul, and which makes it the chosen temple of God's indwelling. He is strong against the onslaughts of men or devils; recollection is to him as a tower of strength to which his enemies cannot approach, inaccessible to all that can soil, or trouble, or wound. "In the Lord's Hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." (Job xii. 10.) He "allures the soul into the wilderness," and there He "speaks comfortably to her;" recollection is in truth God's chosen possession in the heart. Through it a man becomes independent of time, place, occupation, of all that is from without or from within. When a man and woman are married they dwell together, and naught can separate those whom God has joined; even so when the soul has taken Jesus for her Bridegroom, He dwells within her conscience through recollection, and no earthly objects

or occupations ought to have power to part her from Him.

Finally, it may be said that a life of recollection is the sovereign happiness of the soul, the true essence of perfection, the royal road which leads to God, the source of all wisdom and joy.

II

The Director who seeks to lead a soul to God, must persevere in purifying it both inwardly and outwardly.

§ 1. There is no need to marvel because, amid the many who give themselves to God, we find so few who even after a hearty conversion, make great progress in the paths of holiness. The manner in which direction is applied will more than account for this ; it is made too external. Directors enjoin devotional exercises, frequent communion, bodily penances, and the like ; all most valuable in themselves, but worse than useless if we imagine that they are sufficient, while we leave our penitents' hearts and senses the prey of that corruption which is the real source of all evil ; if while we give diligent heed to externals, we do not take care that they be real indications of the inner man. Yet, strange as it may seem, we sometimes shrink from undertaking the task of thoroughly purifying a soul, and rooting up all its lurking evil propensities, because we fear to alarm the penitent we deal

with, and to drive him from us. But surely it is unworthy of God's priests to fear such a result more than we fear injuring a soul.

Then again, our penitents themselves are not always willing to second our efforts to purify them inwardly and outwardly by continual mortification;—the process is too severe. They are willing to seek the sacraments frequently, to be diligent in prayer, in works of charity, in spiritual practices, and even in some bodily austerity. All these things have a tendency to make us feel satisfied and at rest, while beneath this outer veil there lurks a deep-seated inward corruption. Hence two great evils arise: souls do not advance in holiness, and they render themselves unfit to receive God's gifts. You can never make real progress towards perfection unless you die to self; but this death is like all other death, it involves separation, and there can be no purification save by cutting ourselves off from those things which sully the soul. So, too, you are unfit to receive God's gifts, because all the above-mentioned good works will not of themselves dispose the soul for their reception, since it is possible to go on with a routine of pious exercises, and yet to continue full of self-love and self-esteem. Nothing but inward purity fits the soul for God's choicest gifts, and you will find that they are never given to those who are diligent in external practices without seeking after the hidden life of purity. But those

who strive earnestly to purify themselves in every thought and glance, to disentangle themselves from every earthly shackle, will receive His best and choicest blessings.

§ II. Let us grant then, that we are rather to aim at inward purification than at the performance of an infinity of religious exercises, however good. God and the creature have each their part to perform. Strictly speaking, that of the director and his penitent is to strip and purify the soul, which they are able to do. As to exalting it, giving it spiritual perceptions and understanding, and the like, that is beyond our power, or at best we can do but little that way. It is God's part to engross the soul and fill it with His own gifts—to enlighten, to kindle, and to unite it to Himself, and cause it to overflow with His sweetness. If the creature will but do his part faithfully, the Creator never fails on His side. It is as much God's nature to give Himself freely to those hearts which are prepared and ready to receive Him, as it is that of the sun to warm and brighten all wherein it shines.

§ III. Next, how is this purification effected? In two ways, by ourselves and by God. It concerns us to purify ourselves of whatever can leave a stain, whether it be sin or imperfection. Of course it behoves all men to cleanse themselves from sin, and I do not here speak of that which is a rigorous obligation upon all. But beyond this, the really spiritual man must seek to purify himself in things indifferent, and which are not according to the spirit of

grace. He must continually restrain himself in all that tends to an excessive though lawful indulgence of taste and inclination, refusing all that is pleasant to his senses. He must repress his disposition to satisfy them by eagerness of expression and demonstration ; he must be continually on the watch against the most trifling concessions to temper and natural feeling—striving to be moved solely by the Spirit of grace. In this way an interior spirit purifies and chastens all those earthly natural tendencies which, if neglected, may degenerate into what is altogether animal.

But God purifies the soul likewise, and to that end He sometimes deprives it of all consolations and lights. It is He Alone, and no creature, that may do this. You do not fill your own soul with divine lights and riches, and He Who gives them, Alone has the right to take them away ; your part is to receive them humbly when He vouchsafes to communicate them. It would be presumption and false humility in you to affect putting away His gifts under the pretext of detachment and purity, but He may see fit to purify your soul by detaching it from His own gifts, to which human weakness sometimes clings with an earthly attachment. In this way the soul undergoes continual purification, both voluntary and from the Hand of God.

§ IV. There are three practical results from this. 1st. That as your first duty in the spiritual life is to purify

yourself, you must be indefatigable in your exertions, because your nature tends perpetually to what is evil, and with a little negligence your cup of impurity will be filled to the brim. 2nd. Be sure that those who seek perfection by some other path, are losing their time. Attractive paths, bewitching ideas, or rigorous mortifications delude some to forsake the simple lowly self-sacrificing way which alone is safe. 3rd. It appertains to God to enrich, enlighten, comfort, and exalt the soul, and we must not be fretting to ascertain what progress we have made—our sole aim must be to leave all to Him.

4th. Be sure too, that He will no more fail to fill the soul which is swept and garnished ready to receive Him, than the sun's rays will fail to stream into a room when you open the shutters. Depend upon it, those who run here and there after new fancies, do but waste time, and draw farther from God.

III

The Director should specially strive to cure his penitent of all excessive natural clingings, however trifling.

§ I. **W**E are not here dealing with those who are in the bondage of deliberate sin, but rather seeking to help those onwards who seek to advance in the paths of perfection ; neither do we condemn all creature love, which under certain circumstances and for certain objects is

legitimate. Still less is our present point a war against unlawful affections, which carry their own condemnation. We are now rather referring to those natural sympathies and inclinations, those apparently innocent friendships, in which we sometimes find very spiritual persons led astray like others. It is the director's office carefully to watch over and detach the soul from what is too purely natural in such affections, for where we love unrestrainedly, there we are wont to stop short, rather than in God, the Only True Rest of the heart. Those who love know no rest save in the society of him who is loved ; they crave incessantly for his presence, and they are filled with delight when he is near. Then this goes a step farther—the person beloved becomes the heart's idol, and there is nothing but what is sacrificed to him—affections, thoughts, time—all which is due to God Only. He is a Jealous God, and cannot abide that the creature should engross that which is His alone. The troubles which arise out of these natural clingings are endless, and innocent as they may be in the abstract, they enervate and too often soil the purity of a soul which aspires to be wholly God's : they stifle and hinder its straight course towards Him ; they keep from Him the choicest gift we have to offer,—the heart's pure love.

§ II. Your heart is God's temple, His abode. He dwells therein through grace, and by means of His Blessed Sacrament. Is it not a profanation to divide that heart between

God and the creature? Dare you erect an idol in that sanctuary? He will have undivided possession there, nor is all the beauty, all the tender grace that earth ever contained, worthy to be put for one moment in competition with that which is His only.

§ III. The great aim in guiding souls is to lead them by the way of mortification, and of all the deaths we need to die, that of the heart is foremost. An unmortified heart involves general lack of mortification, but if it "die daily," the other members will share in its death to sin. Therefore seek to guard yourself and those under you who are dedicated to God from earthly attachments. Avoid all excessive display of affection and interest to those bound to you by spiritual ties, and train them, as they gain strength and advance in the interior life, to increasing detachment, even from the stay and consolation which we all find in resting upon a beloved and revered director.

IV

True mortification must be simple.

§ 1. **S**OME persons fall into the error of seeking rather after something attractive and startling in God's service than its simple unpretending truth; they aim really at what tends to self-exaltation, more than after a hidden life. Ascetism and zeal are worthy of a great mind; recollection and spirituality are graceful and attractive; but death

to self unseen, unnoticed, has little attraction for those who, perhaps unknowingly, are still swelling with great thoughts of themselves and secret self-consciousness.

§ 11. He who aims at perfection must mortify his ordinary desires.

Almost all beginners in the spiritual life, and all who feel the tender influences of grace, are liable to entertain very ardent desires after what is exalted and perfect. No doubt, it is a good thing ardently to desire grace; Daniel is praised in Holy Scripture as "a man of desires,"¹ and our Blessed Lord called them blessed who hunger after righteousness; of a truth no desires can be too ardent if they are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. But not unfrequently our longings after holiness, peace, perfection, are of a more earthly human character, and therefore we should all do well to adopt S. Francis de Sales' maxim, "I wish for but little, nor do I wish eagerly for that."

Eager wishes for the most part savour of self-love. If you are eager for the attainment of something looked for, but not yet possessed, are you not apt to be anxious and impatient? But is the object of your wishes as important as the inward peace of your soul? Again, do not your wishes tend chiefly to the tangible, sensible enjoyment even of spiritual things? and does not this arise from a

¹ Dan. x. 11. "A man greatly beloved;" or in margin, "a man of desires;" "Vir desideriorum"—(Vulg.).

lack of real poverty of spirit, such as our Lord has pronounced blessed? We are prone to desire that which we think good, far more than simply that which the Lord wills; but he who knows no other will than God's, is not cumbered by all these seething restless wishes, attains real peace, and his desires become, so to say, transformed into the Mind of God.

§ III. Strive then, to be able to feel honestly that you desire nothing about you to be other than it is, sin only excepted; to commit the past to God, and not to look anxiously into the future; content with that present moment which contains God's actual manifest Will for you. Such a mental attitude will ensure you absolute peace—all troubles, misfortunes, vexations, disappointments will be endurable when met thus; you will see a Father's Hand in every trial and desolation, and content to rest therein you will not be disposed to waste one sigh upon anything withheld or imposed upon you.

§ IV. Privation is a means towards perfection.

The right use of privation is a most important point in the spiritual life, in default of which many pious persons gain no good, or are perhaps thrown back by what should have been a means of progress. I mean the privation of things good in themselves—graces, favours, consciousness that God is visiting the soul, leisure for prayer, solitude, spiritual guidance and instruction. But always bear in mind that our enjoyment of these

and the like gifts, is for the most part brief and interrupted : God's visits to the inner heart of men are brief, or we might presume upon them ; our treasured solitude is broken by a hundred unforeseen occurrences ; business necessarily curtails our seasons of prayer, and the director whose guidance seemed so incalculable a blessing, is withdrawn just when we expected it least. Within, we have to endure dryness, bitterness, desolation ; without, all that seems most calculated to help us is lacking. Such are the complaints which the guide of souls is continually hearing, and if these privations are not used to sanctification, they will grievously injure the spiritual life.

§ v. How then, are they to be sanctified ? All we need is to bear them bravely. For instance, you are earnestly striving after certain graces, which are less easy of attainment than you hoped for, and you are disposed to fret under the delay. Bear patiently with the privation, wait God's time for accomplishing that which your impatience would fain do all at once, never relaxing your earnest efforts the while.

If God seems to forsake you, and you feel sad and lonely, bear the privation in deep humility, confessing yourself unworthy of one glance from Him, so far from claiming the delights of His Abiding Presence.

If your delicate constitution or feeble health prevent your practising austerities and mortifications to which

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you are drawn, accept the privation in lowly simplicity and mortify your will.

Or, if you are restricted in time for solitude and prayer, after which your soul hungers, remember that God is the Ruler of every instant of your time, and leave Him to dispose of it as He will, preferring any amount of external distraction which He may see fit to send, to the most delightful calm and leisure which are self-chosen.

Perhaps you have been deprived of a director who suited you specially, who seemed to understand you better than anyone else, and under whom you thought you were making marked progress;—but nevertheless do not murmur. Is not the Creator better than the creature, and may you not walk more surely by the light of the sun itself than by that of a feeble lantern? Be sure that God withdrew the earthly stay that He Himself might be your Guide, or it may be that He will fill the gap with some more efficient help. In all such privations, there are three points wherein we gain. 1st. Because the more we are deprived of all that is not God, the more we are disposed to win Him, and He seeks a pure uncumbered heart. 2. Because they tend to purify our hearts from ill-regulated desires to see, know, and enjoy everything. 3rd. Because they teach us more and more to rest in nothing short of the possession of God.

§ VI. External mortification is the way to perfection.

Nothing so subdues our natural self-love, the tendency

of which is constant self-assertion, as external mortification. This is twofold—that which other men inflict upon us whether we will or no, and that which we seek to impose upon ourselves voluntarily. To this end,

1st. Strive to mortify your desire to shine before others ; restrain your inclination to seem clever, brilliant, or learned in conversation ; aim at that true simplicity in word and thought which cannot fail to banish all self-consciousness and affectation.

2nd. If you have talents do not seek to display them, and when they are rightly called forth avoid vanity and complacency of self-assertion.

3rd. Mortify your vanity in dress and appearance, shunning all that is remarkable, rather dressing as simply as is suitable to your position in life.

4th. Avoid such society as has no claim upon you either of charity, necessity, or kindness and courtesy, and seek to be unnoticed among men. He who is always ready to come forward, soon becomes distracted and dissipated, but those who hide themselves in lowliness will find God.

5th. Seek to conceal all that is good in you, all that will tend to make others think highly of you, and let all you say and do be simple and matter of fact—virtue once displayed is like a sweet perfume, soon carried away by the wind.

§ VII. Be content to be forsaken by men, whether it be through cowardice and treachery, or because they despise

you ; rejoice that you are left alone with God. If you belong to a community, accept the most despicable offices therein with thankfulness, remembering how Jesus spent the greater part of His days on earth in hidden lowliness. If others seem scarcely to remember your existence, if you are neglected by all around, bethink you that you are but the more remembered by Jesus. Be sure that there is no safer mental attitude, none less the prey to delusion, than perfect willingness to be disregarded, effaced,—nothing more helpful to him who seeks God.

Privation will help you to win true detachment, and the mortification of your desires will chasten your will. True poverty of spirit is the way to perfection. Let your aim be to extinguish all spirit of self-seeking, and in a total abnegation of your natural wishes to open the door of your heart that God may enter in and fill it.

V

Souls that are struggling with weariness and discouragement must be trained to a loving acceptance of dryness and darkness.


§ 1. **T**HE Holy Spirit of God is wont to come and go, even as the natural sun shines one day in gracious brilliancy, and is hidden the next in cloud and mist. "Thou hast taken me up and cast me down," the Prophet

says (Ps. cii. 10). He who fails to remember this is liable to fits of discouragement and revulsion in prayer and spiritual exercises, which may easily lead on to laxity or even total neglect thereof. Many a soul has wasted precious time in self-torment, for want of learning this lesson, as though the spiritual life were meant to be an even course of sweetness and satisfaction! And as this is a trouble which those who deal with the conscience have frequently to encounter, it may be well to investigate the source whence it arises.

§ II. Whence then does discouragement spring?

The two main causes of this hindrance are curiosity and sensuality. Beginners, and often too, those who are more advanced in the spiritual life, are apt to pry into God's ways: they look for continual marvels of grace in their hearts; they expect fresh light to be perpetually streaming in upon them, and hence their imagination presumptuously strives after more than God assigns them. Such persons are given to fancy that special revelations are made to them, and, distorting God's Grace, they become puffed up with spiritual pride, the end being that they reap the whirlwind, and fall back in disappointment and disgust.

§ III. Secondly, man's natural tendency to seek all that is pleasant, leads him to seek spiritual self-indulgence, even when he is renouncing that which is material. And so he seeks a sensible gratification in holy things



which eludes his too eager grasp, and nothing remains save exhaustion of brain and mental lassitude. How rarely do we find a soul prepared to seek God stedfastly without heeding personal gratification or light, knowing how to close the door of sense, and offer itself, in unquestioning simplicity, a sacrifice to God! Nevertheless this weariness and darkness may be turned to good account.

§ IV. "The Lord shall make my darkness to be light." Such darkness is a royal road, to be chosen far beyond the brightest light—a road lit up solely by the star of faith, a darkness wherein you are fain to lean on God Alone, asking nothing save to keep close to Him, unwitting as to whither He may vouchsafe to lead you.

It is a sure token of His Love that He thus vouchsafes to teach you lowliness. Great spiritual light is apt to puff up the heart with pride, and God tries us with darkness, "that He may withdraw man from His purpose, and hide pride from man." (Job xxxiii. 17.) Grace is safest when it does not shine in the open light, and the less earthliness there is in our appreciation of God's gifts, the safer, be sure, you are in their possession.

§ V. So too, as to spiritual dryness. The soul easily loses self-control amid an abundance of sweetness, and in proportion its mental vigour is diminished. Those who have done the noblest work for God's Glory have often tasted but little spiritual sweetness, and S. Francis Xavier

cried out to his Lord to stay His Hand, "It is too much, Lord too much!" It is a fatal mistake to set your heart upon such passing treasures, which tend to over-eagerness in expectation, vanity in possession, and vain regret in their loss; for they fleet by as rapidly as the clouds before the wind; moreover the soul is in danger of cleaving to them rather than to God. But it is a very great thing to be able to bear the deprivation of all inward consolation, whether out of pure love and submission to God's Will, or in acknowledgment of past grievous sin, and its deserved punishment.

§ VI. It is a great matter to be able to say amid all privation: "One thing can never be taken from me, I am rich in God." Strive then, to divest yourself of the common error which imagines holiness to consist in fine imaginations and bright lights; remember that God would have you act rather than feel, and that the real test of goodness is to be found in what you do. Bethink you that light and consolation belong rather to Heaven than earth, which is the scene of toil, darkness, struggle, and victory. Dwell hopefully on the thought that brightness, and sweetness, and the gratification of all spiritual perceptions are in store for those who in this life have patiently trodden their appointed paths, however dark and dull. Welcome all your dryness and obscurity with the thought that God sees your heart through it all; accept it as the means of crushing your pride and self-will. Be

content to know that God dwells in your understanding, though without one ray of light; in your will, though without any perceptible fervour; in your heart, though without any sensible consolation: and thus you will be safe alike in life and in death.


VI

How to use distractions in prayer.

§ 1. **I**T may seem bold to attempt to show that our very distractions may be turned to good account, remembering how, from the beginning, holy men have groaned under them. Job and Daniel complained of the hindrance caused by "the thoughts of the heart," and S. Teresa says that at the end of forty years she had failed to find the means of banishing the flights and follies of her imagination during prayer. Nevertheless, it can be shown that even this trial may be used to a good purpose. But first of all, we must distinguish very clearly between two classes of persons who suffer from distractions in prayer, namely, those who maintain a constant spirit of watchfulness, and who are continually aiming at perfection, and those who practise no self-control, and pay little or no attention to the hidden life. The gain from such trial does not apply to this latter class; we cannot wonder if prayer is irksome to them, or expect that distractions,

which are the result of their ill-regulated hearts and passions, their frivolous or profane habits, can be turned to their sanctification. They do but reap what they have sown. But among persons intent on attaining perfection, there are many who, nevertheless, often suffer cruelly from distractions, which S. Augustine says seethe and swarm around them like worms in a putrefying body. Such persons fear that these distractions must impede their union with God, or destroy all its grace, as well as be the cause of actual sin.

§ II. Contemplation is a work of the understanding, a simple glance towards the First Great Truth, without words or argument, says S. Thomas. Further, it consists in an act of the will, the work of love, by which (to again quote S. Thomas) we enter God's Presence, and pass on to union with Him. Now involuntary distractions cannot destroy contemplation, because they cannot hinder the operation of the understanding, which is beyond the reach of low-born earthly phantoms. But many worthy persons confuse the processes of understanding and of imagination, and torment themselves with the fear that they have offended God by accepting and consenting to evil thoughts, which in point of fact, are merely vagaries of the imagination, amid which their will has remained unimpaired. And although such importunate distractions are a real hindrance to prayer, stealing away the attention and crippling its power, they do not harm the will, which works



by love, and which cannot be harmed save by sin consented to. As a test of this, observe that although distractions may cause you to wander afar during prayer, your heart returns in love and peace to God so soon as you are conscious of a wandering imagination, and make an effort to subdue it.

§ III. Contemplation is union of the soul with God, and He deals with us in that as in most other things, concealing the method by which He works : *e.g.* we are familiar with the fact that body and soul are closely united, but the nature of that union is a profound mystery. Minds and hearts are closely knit together in this life—but who can explain how it comes to pass? How much less can we attempt to understand that most sacred and mysterious of all unions, the soul with God? It is hidden beneath the veil of our imperfections and distractions, which tend to keep us humble even while we rejoice in the greatness of the gift.

§ IV. When distractions are not sinful.

Further, let the scrupulous soul learn that all distractions are not sin. They may proceed from ill-regulated affections, or from the lack of a prayerful habit of mind, or from a lively though weak imagination, or they may be permitted by God as a trial and temptation. Now of course when an infinitude of distractions disturb the heart from either of the first two causes, we cannot call them innocent. People who give way to these, dis-

honour God, and acquire fresh stains from the very thing which should purify them. We do not seek to supply comfort to such as these ; but to the other two classes of minds, when disturbed by wandering thoughts, we would say, Be not afraid, this is not sin. Your imagination is earthly and rebellious, but you are not yielding to it, and your difficulties do not discourage you from diligence in prayer. Consequently they are not sinful.

Perhaps you will reply that you cannot but fear that these besetting distractions must offend God. Are they not utterly unwelcome to you? Yes, of a truth ! Well then, take comfort, that displeasure is your safeguard and your justification ; sin involves consent to that act which is the matter of sin. And if you feel afraid lest some subtle scarce-perceived consent should creep in, ask yourself, Do you not constantly and heartily resist and renounce all such distractions? If so, such resistance is a proof that you do not consent to them—we do not consent to a thing unwillingly borne. A venerable writer, Blosius, says that God will not hold us responsible for such distractions, the consequence of mere frailty, especially when we are sighing and struggling to set ourselves free from them. He Who knows the frailty of His creature, will not be quick to take offence at these inevitable imperfections.

Moreover, if you feel doubtful as to whether such distractions do not arise from your own fault in neglecting

duly to regulate your heart, you may be guided by a safe rule in all moral philosophy ; namely, having sinned, to examine whether the sin is habitual ? and then, if it be only accidental, and you thoroughly abhor it, be not afraid. Beware of adding to your own perplexities and distractions by self-torment. Be sure that some little submission of your own judgment will stand you in good stead ; you have quite enough of real sin to be sorry for, without fretting over imaginary faults.

§ v. How to use distractions.

But now, let us suppose that your distractions in prayer are at once the consequence and the punishment of some fault you have committed ; that they smother your better thoughts, overshadow all your light, and hinder your spiritual perception. Well then, you are feeling the weight of God's Chastening Hand, Which is taking vengeance upon your unfaithfulness ; His is a Jealous Spirit, and He is wont to punish our heedlessness and shortcoming, specially in the seasons of prayer. But is all lost because you feel yourself under a cloud, and deprived of spiritual delights by your own distracted heart ? Learn rather to lie still beneath the rod, rejoicing thus to atone for your faults. Accept your mental incapacity, and the suffering of these humiliating distractions as the penalty of your sin. Above all, when you pray, place yourself as a miserable worm grovelling in the dust before the Glorious Throne of God's Ineffable Majesty, and confess that

you deserve nothing save to be cast out from His Presence ; unworthy of His Love, meet only to endure His Wrath. So doing, you will turn the trial of your distractions into a blessing, and increase your humility. None save the proud dare rejoice in the Bridegroom's favours, when they remember their own worthlessness.

§ vi. Again, you may feel that your distractions are the consequence of an unruly, flighty imagination ; you complain that you cannot maintain for a moment unbroken recollection, in spite of all your efforts. Do what you will, your imagination rushes away from the Presence of God in pursuit of a multitude of frivolities, to the utter destruction of all calm and peaceful prayer. But it is a mistake to suppose that this proves you incapable thereof. It may prove that you cannot yet enjoy the sweetness of prayer, but you can offer it up as a sacrifice. Strive once for all thoroughly to grasp the idea that nothing is more acceptable to God than when we heartily offer all our weakness and helplessness to Him. The soul which comes before Him thus humbly, will never fail to win His notice. He delights to see us acknowledge and accept our powerlessness—which indeed is our greatest strength. S. Paul says, "When I am weak, then am I strong." Everyone wishes to be capable and strong ; no one likes to be conscious of infirmity and weakness ; but nevertheless it is a great grace to know how to offer such weakness, such incapacity to struggle successfully even against

your own distractions in prayer. Offer your frail imagination, with all its aberrations, to Him Who made you ; resign yourself to your deficiency in all that is good ; tell God that you can do nothing, but you know that He can and will do all. Surely by this means you may turn your most vexatious distractions to a good and holy purpose.

§ VII. Sometimes distractions in prayer go yet further ; they take the shape of a vivid remembrance of past sin, or imagination of future possible sin, which sweeps over the troubled soul in overwhelming shame and horror, and utterly destroy all peace. Such are unquestionably temptations which the devil is permitted to bring upon the soul. But be not dismayed even at these. Offer your imagination, tempted as it is, to God : think of holy Job, upon whom God permitted Satan to try all his tempting powers, mental as well as bodily. Place yourself before God's Judgment Seat as a criminal, your imagination being the instrument of torture wherewith Satan as executioner is scourging you ; and thus you will effectually turn his wiles against himself, and promote God's gracious intentions for your soul.

§ VIII. Lastly, take the counsel Blossius gives to those who are distracted in prayer. "Turn away," he says, "from all these inward perplexities and griefs, these mental struggles, and do not seek so painfully to get rid of your distractions and to attain recollection." Greater simplicity ;

—that is what he means. Try gently to put them aside by cultivating holy thoughts, but if your mind persists in wandering, go on doing your best, unweariedly and calmly; and if the distractions persist, treat them as unwelcome guests, who must be tolerated patiently, while we would fain be rid of them. If you neglect this counsel you will but strengthen the hands of your enemy by your over-eagerness. The very heat with which you strive kindles the evil, and you run the risk of weariness and despondency. You leave no time for those holy gentle thoughts which are the best antidote to Satan's suggestions, and your persistent desire for rest runs the risk of becoming a form of self-seeking and impatient resistance of spiritual trial.

Meanwhile, those who aim at a free spirit of undistracted prayer, should give heed to four points.

1st. Be as little alive as may be to what is going on in the world around you.

2nd. Keep diligent guard over your senses, and the impressions they receive from outward things.

3rd. Do not expend your mental treasures upon superfluous frivolities; and

4th, Beware that your heart be not absorbed by creature love. These are the channels by which distractions and wandering thoughts are fed, and those who know how to keep them clear will taste the precious fruits of recollected prayer. Then, as the prophet says, "I the Lord

their God will hear them." (Zech. x. 6.) "I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." (Amos ix. 15.) But he who continually leaves the door of his senses open to all intruders, has no right to marvel if a hundred distracting follies overpower him in the time of prayer. He has rejected God in his daily life ; what wonder if God rejects him in his season of prayer.

VII

Nothing so unites us to Jesus as abjection.—Abjection the Saviour's delight.

§ 1. **B**EFORE entering upon this subject, let it be clearly understood that among these blessings of lowliness and humiliation, we do not refer to crosses, persecution, temptation, or suffering generally. What is meant here, is insignificance, and a condition despicable in men's eyes, subject to contempt and rebuff. And here again, bear in mind that such a condition may be found in two forms ; in community life, where a person fills the most despised and least honourable post or office ; or more generally, when he is looked down upon, and contemned by the world at large. Now, such abjection may be the most priceless blessing to him who learns to abide

therein with Jesus. Our Dear Master has a very special love for those whom the world rejects and despises ; it turns contemptuously from the lowly, whom Jesus " setteth up ;" to whom He likened Himself as " a worm, and no man, a very scorn of men and the Outcast of the people." (Ps. xxii. 6.) " Despised and rejected of men." (Is. liii. 3.) Jesus cannot delight save in holiness, and be sure that he who is content to be despised and trampled on by the world is on the high road to holiness. The Lord " scattereth the proud," but He " exalts the humble and meek." None so closely resemble Jesus as those who are hidden, despised, contemned. In meditating on the Passion, we can scarce fail to feel that the most striking point is not our Dear Lord's persecution, His scourging, or even His crucifixion, but His wondrous abjection and voluntary humiliation. Surely S. Paul had deeply meditated this when he wrote those marvellous words of Christ Jesus ; " He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant." (Phil. ii. 7.) S. Paul does not say that Christ humbled Himself by His sufferings, by His agony, or by bondage, but by *taking upon Him the form of a servant or slave*. There is a certain grandeur about suffering nobly borne ; but shame and contumely seem fit only for the vile and worthless, and therefore it is more marvellous and glorious that Jesus should have taken such to Himself, even than His Cross and Passion.

§ II. Doubtless they may be " counted happy that en-

dures" temptation, persecution, pain and sickness, for such are partakers in the Cross of Christ. But be sure that still more precious in Jesus' Sight are those who accept contempt and abjection in union with Him, saying heartily, "It is a very small thing that I should be judged of man's judgment" (1 Cor. iv. 3); whose sole ambition is to be judged favourably by their Lord.

As a rule whatever may be our work or our sufferings, self-love creeps in, and we seek the praise of man, our own interest, or the like; but abjection is the very grave of self-love, where pride lies buried for ever. It meets with no worldly esteem, society will none of it, it jars against the world's standard, which cries out even as Pilate, "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" as though He and His followers were alike fit only to be cast out. What shall be done with the lowly Christian? Ah truly! that is a mighty question, and the answer is, He shall be received and upheld by His Lord and Saviour! "I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her" (Hos. ii. 14), says that Divine Lover of the soul. And that wilderness is the desert of abjection, from which all nature recoils. There He has undivided possession of His creature, there He wins the soul to Himself, and imparts Himself unsparingly to it.

§ III. Man's esteem perils the conscience in numberless ways, but to be despised of men, not to be esteemed for talent, dignity, reputation, eloquence, or whatever it may

be, is a vast barrier between the soul and sin. He who can say for love of Christ, "I am good for nothing so far as this world goes, incapable of everything, despised by all, but I can devote my humiliation and worthlessness to my Master's love," may well rejoice in his abjection.

§ iv. He who is truly abject delights in Jesus only.

The man who is rejected of the world, despised, counted as naught, set aside, will naturally turn to seek rest and consolation in Jesus, even as the exile yearns after a refuge. The despised Christian is a spiritual exile among men ;—blessed indeed if he turns to his Dear Lord for consolation. Such a man will see the falsehood, the vanity and selfishness of the world too much to desire its favour very urgently ; but the human heart craves some delight, it cannot go on altogether without any satisfaction, and having learnt by a bitter experience where such satisfaction is *not* to be found, it flies to the Feet of Jesus, and crying out, "Lord, it is good for me to be here !" rests in safety beneath His Cross. There the sorrowful soul never fails to find a welcome, a tender pitiful sympathy, and the more his fellow-creatures fail him, the more closely he will find himself drawn to Jesus' Bosom.

§ v. Again, the soul which has no earthly pretensions, which looks for no favour at man's hands, will cast itself wholly and without reserve upon God ; "Let Him do with me as He will !" is its sole cry. Blessed is that soul in truth. Those who would fain stand well with the world,

and win earthly praise or fame, are slaves and bondsmen ; but he who looks for no favour save that of his Lord, is like S. Paul,—“free-born.” He will look from out his shelter within “the hole of the rock,” upon the emptiness, the blindness of the world, and rejoice in the Light of Life. He will taste a divine union with his God, such as none can enjoy, save when called forth into utter solitude with Him only,—a union for time and for eternity.

§ VI. If you are lightly esteemed of men because of any natural deficiency—a lack of personal or mental advantages—say to yourself, “It is God that has made me thus. Surely His Creating Hand has meted out to me precisely that measure of talent, or capacity, or attraction, which is best for me, and anything else would be a loss, not a gain to my soul.” Or, if unforeseen events place you in a humiliating position, say, “Jesus, my Lord, made Himself to be of no reputation for my sake. Shall I not follow Him?” Who can ever be abased as He was? whose gifts, physical or mental, be so unduly despised? or who, after meditating upon His Manhood, dare count up his own talents or his graces? Bethink you too, how He still humbles Himself in the Blessed Sacrament, vouchsafing to come and dwell in the hearts of weak, erring, it may even be well-nigh sacrilegious men!

VIII

Shame cheerfully borne, a high point towards perfection.

§ I. **P**ERHAPS of all things hard and abhorrent to the natural man, shame is the most insupportable. It differs from abjection or contempt heaped on us by others, in that it is the confusion and humiliation which arise from the display of our own meanness and infirmity. The very word causes dismay. Nevertheless, shame rightly accepted is a great grace. Let us consider it under three heads :—Shame before God ; shame in confession, and shame before men.

§ II. The shame and confusion we feel before God is when, in the silence of our heart, He sets before us in plain colours the humiliating grievous sins of which aforetime we have been guilty. In vain the tortured soul would banish their memory ; God presses them home—it may be during seasons of prayer, or other sacred exercises—and perhaps for days and weeks we are haunted by hateful visions of the past. Or the devil is permitted to fill us with confusion by assaulting us with shameful temptations. What can be more trying to a soul which has cast aside past things ? and yet God constrains it to drink the bitter cup to the very dregs, and that in expiation for former perversion of will. He ordains that

those very things which were once the cause of sinful pleasure, should now be the rod wherewith the sinner is scourged.

And here great discretion is needed. For want of it, the soul frets and fumes, trying vainly to escape, and avenging itself unwisely upon the body, through fear of renewed sin. Yet the real danger is pride, which cannot endure to have past falls thus called to mind, and which seeks to escape the shame inseparable from such recollections. Bear in mind, however, that we are not called upon to strive to recall such memories, or dwell upon them of ourselves, but that when God brings them before us in His Own way, or sheds a fresh light upon the well-nigh forgotten past, the soul should accept the humiliation patiently, and as the Prophet says, "be confounded, and bear thy shame." (Ezek. xvi. 52.)

§ III. A second phase of shame is in confession, wherein we lay bare the most hidden recesses of the soul; for few men are so hardened as to make a sacrilegious confession, or explain away facts, to escape the inevitable shame. And here it is well to remember that there is no part of confession we need to accept so willingly as its shame. Nothing so promotes a true spirit of repentance, and no penance is so effectual as voluntary confusion of face.

You know by experience how much it costs you to tell your grievous sins to your confessor, and you know that you wince more under the shame than under the heaviest

penance ever laid upon you. But "there is a shame which bringeth sin, and there is a shame which is glory and grace" (Ecclus. iv. 21); and every true penitent should seek this healing shame as more acceptable to God's Justice than the most severe penances.

§ iv. The third form in which shame has to be borne is before men, when some personal or family disgrace, hitherto concealed, is brought to light; or when your natural defects are exposed, or again, when your undertakings fail, and expose you to contempt.

§ v. But all these forms in which shame comes upon man may be turned to a sanctifying purpose, for nothing so thoroughly eradicates pride as the bitterness of shame; and therefore the Lord sometimes wills His creatures to "drink the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wring them out." (Isaiah li. 17.)

§ vi. In order to sanctify the first form of deep shame, namely, the haunting memory of past sin, you must inwardly place yourself as a criminal before the Justice of God, and confessing yourself vile beyond all measure, accept all the misery and all the shame of your troubled thoughts as the due reward of your guilt. But to enable you to bear this, call to mind your Dear Lord overwhelmed with the sins of the whole world, and "made a curse for us," as S. Paul says. (Gal. iii. 13.) Unite your bitter shame to His, remembering that He bore it without having sinned, while yours is the result of your own sin.

§ VII. As to the shame of confession, offer it in expiation to God. The last kind of shame of which I spoke is, so to say, a physical necessity ;—this a moral necessity.—Do you strive to offer yourself up to a voluntary shame by from time to time confessing the most humiliating sins of your past life, according as you may be prompted by grace and by God's Holy Spirit. They have been already confessed, and you are under no obligation to confess them again ; but it is profitable to make this a voluntary offering of your shame to God's justice. It will be no slight effort ; we all shrink from giving a more unfavourable impression of ourselves to our confessors than can be helped, and sometimes indeed, one is tempted to try and convey an indirect impression that we have not gone astray as many others have done. Of course this is a measure to be cautiously used, and not without there is good reason to believe the confessor worthy of such confidence. Still be sure that the soul which can offer this sweet savour of mental suffering, will receive a blessing, and may hope to be received as an acceptable sacrifice.

§ VIII. The commonest form in which we have to encounter shame is before our fellow men ; and the best way to sanctify this is to be willing to be vile in their sight. Think how much more you might have to bear ! How would it be if all your secret sins, the acts known to none, were published abroad ? As the Prophet says, “ Be thou

confounded and bear thy shame, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame." (Ezek. xvii. 52, 63.) Remember how mercifully God has dealt with you, and accept such confusion of face as He permits to come upon you joyfully. Often say to yourself, "If those around knew what I have been, and if this outward veil of holiness were stripped from off me, how would those who now revere, loathe me!" And lastly, under any and every form in which shame may try you, turn your thoughts to the Lamb of God, His garments torn off, His Sacred Body exposed to the rude gaze of men, bound, and scourged. Cast yourself at His Feet, and drink the bitter cup of shame, in whatever shape it is set before you, in union with Him Who drained it for you. Then, and then only, you will be able to uproot pride, and to become a willing victim of humiliation.

IX

Silence sanctifies crosses. — Sanctifying silence under calumny.

§ 1. **T**OO often our crosses fail to effect all they might, owing to the want of a right reception. It is sad to see so many well-meaning people, who fail to use their crosses rightly, nay, who too often fall into fresh sin

instead of being purged from their rust by the fire of tribulation.

It is said that there is scarcely any wholly pure love of God to be found on earth; neither are there many crosses borne purely for His Sake. The triumphs of the Cross are as rare as those of love. Yet it is perhaps easier to suffer well than to love perfectly. He who is able to preserve silence has well-nigh gained the victory, and it is through unrestrained speech that men often lose the grace of their crosses. Silence sanctifies suffering. But as the cross laid upon men varies, so does the silence to be practised under it. Thus there is one kind of silence which abstains from self-justification under misrepresentation; another which refrains from murmuring under sickness and humiliation; and a third which sanctifies interior troubles by a reverent adoration.

§ II. Let us consider how silence under calumny sanctifies the soul. When the trial hour comes, our natural feelings are roused, we feel the sharp sting keenly, and it is seldom that grace is able altogether to restrain the excitement of nature, and thus a certain moral helplessness to use the cross rightly comes upon us. Some few saintly souls there are who have learnt how to bear it with heroic courage, but these are rare, and ordinary men like ourselves have no refuge save in silence. Great acts may be out of reach to most of us, but we can all restrain the tongue if we will.

§ III. He who abstains from self-justification sanctifies the accusations and calumnies brought against him, because by so doing he offers up the sacrifice of his reputation to God. It is well-nigh the hardest thing a man can do, and many good people, self-denying in other respects, are keenly sensitive to whatever touches this. The esteem of man is very dear to us all, and our natural impetuosity bursts forth the moment it is imperilled. Then silence becomes a great gift. Look at the saints, how patiently they endured to be "made a gazing stock by reproach," and be sure that while other mortifications (Heb. x. 33) may wound the deadly pride which dwells in us, this strikes its deathblow, and crushes out human respect. But what is this compared to the example of our Blessed Lord in His Passion? Full of mystery and awe as is every point thereof, what so marvellous as His Silence amid insult and false accusation! "JESUS ANSWERED NOTHING." That is all the Evangelists say of Him—

"Who with one rough word, some early day,
Their idol world and them shall sweep for aye away."

Follow Him in spirit to the palace of the high priest, to Annas' house, to the hall of judgment, to Pilate, to Herod, accused, scoffed at, mocked, reviled, and "opening not His Mouth." Who but must kneel down in self-accusation as he gazes upon this Example, and remember how often his own tongue has been let loose in vehement angry self-justification?

Let it be your rule when misrepresentation and calumny try you, and you doubt how far you ought to be silent under them, never to yield to your natural promptings. They are sure to be contrary to the Mind of Christ. Neither do you yield to the injudicious advice of kindly-intentioned, but unwise friends, who are apt to forget that Holy Scripture calls the tongue "a fire, a world of iniquity, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell" (James iii. 6). There are few whose friendship is so real as to strengthen those they love in bearing unjust imputations with meek silence; therefore do you fix your eyes on your silent Master, rather than on any human aid, for comfort.

§ iv. But after all, you will say, surely self-justification is lawful under certain circumstances? Not only lawful, it is obligatory:—1st, When the interests of others are concerned; 2nd, When anyone in a public capacity would be hindered in serving God through silence, or give scandal to others; 3rd, When you are required to justify yourself by those in authority over you; for obedience is the first of sacrifices. Nevertheless, this must be done with caution and reserve, lest under pretext of duty you give way to mere feeling, and from simply declaring the truth you go on to set forth the goodness of your intentions, and the malice of your slanderers.

§ v. Silence sanctifies sickness and humiliation.

Some people pour themselves out in complaints

under these trials, and others, while professing great resignation and endurance, are but indulging a subtle form of vanity, seeking to be admired for their patience. But a large-hearted, generous mind will rather bear all trials in silence.

§ VI. He who dwells lovingly on his Saviour's humiliations and pains will hold his own unworthy to be considered. Whatever may come upon him he will count as less than a sinner's meed. We are too apt to treat our griefs and pains as possessing a sort of mysterious grandeur, whence arises a very high opinion of ourselves, and our heroic endurance; but this is a mere excuse of vanity. A great saint has said that to a noble soul all troubles are but mere shadows. But then to a little heart everything seems great, and to a great heart everything seems little. A noble heart would fain have no witness of what it bears save God. However sharp the pains which try him, such a man gathers himself together and seeks comfort of God Only. Within his own heart is a holy solitude kept for God; he accepts and ponders all that tries him, and how lovingly that precious Father deals with His frail creature who is casting all care upon Him! None save the lonely sorrowful soul can tell what that solitude is! But too often we render ourselves unworthy of His consolations by the eagerness with which we seek those of a lower kind; and He will not have His comforts put on a level with those of the world. Our

great aim in pain, and sickness, and disappointment, should be to look upwards to Him Who wills us to be tried, rather than down to the earthly trial; not brooding, not pouring ourselves out in complaint, but "waiting patiently upon the Lord."

§ VII. It is a good rule to try and bear suffering as though one were insensible to it, and while heart and soul are striving within us, or irritated passions boiling fiercely, to aim at external calmness and silence. Natural vanity often knows how to find a solace in letting others see what we suffer, and how well we can bear it; but if you would win all the grace offered you in suffering, put aside all human respect. By degrees your inward turmoil will be stilled, peace will be won, and, above all, your sufferings will be sanctified by God's Favour and Grace.

§ VIII. Silence sanctifies interior crosses.

Before entering upon this point, we may define silence as the cessation of utterance, and there are as many kinds of silences as of utterances. Now, there is an interior as well as an exterior utterance; consequently, there must also be an interior silence. And as outward silence sanctifies outward crosses, so inward silence sanctifies those which are interior.

Look at a soul which is sorely tried by temptation, weariness, and disappointment. Perhaps it does not vainly seek outward consolation, but inwardly it writhes, and frets and groans, and so frustrates the gain which

otherwise would have accrued from these trials. But a true inward silence realizes first, that all these troubles are permitted by God, and therefore they should be met with calmness. The heart so filled says with the Apostles by the sea of Tiberias, "It is the Lord" (John xxi. 7). "I kept silence," says David, "I became dumb and opened not my mouth, for it was Thy doing" (Ps. xxxix. 3, 10). This is the silence of reverence. There is another silence of adoration, in which the soul bows down before the heavenly cross laid upon it—a silence far more expressive than any acts, a perpetual adoration.

§ ix. This silence refines and exalts all inward suffering. It realizes the words of Job, "In my flesh shall I see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me" (xix. 27). Moreover, it brings the sufferer into very close union with the Suffering Heart of Jesus.

§ x. But while thus acknowledging the grace of silence, remember that you may always rightly make known your trials to your director, your superior, or to a good and holy friend; indeed it is a matter of duty as regards the two first, and the third is quite allowable. Nevertheless, there is a danger even in this. It is hard to speak of our crosses without condemning others and justifying ourselves, and there is often the temptation to indulge in needless talking of oneself, if not in downright exaggeration.

Therefore, do not be over-communicative out of mere self-indulgence ; let obedience and simplicity guard all you say, and try to be satisfied, even if you are not heeded or comforted as you desire. Let all you say be dictated by a spirit of humility. God has appointed human means for your guidance and consolation ; accept them : there is such a thing as a proud and wilful rejection of earthly comfort. Strive to attain the habit of expressing your needs and sorrows curtly. Nature loves to swim in a sea of words. And give heed that the friend to whom you open your grief be not a mere worldly friend, whose ear and heart are alive chiefly to the earthly side of your troubles. "Take knowledge" of him, "that he has been with Jesus," and see that he be the friend of Christ and of the Cross before you choose him as your friend.

X

*A spirit of absolute resignation is necessary in order to
God's sole reign in the soul.*

Resignation under all varying conditions.

§ I. SUCH resignation as this can only be the work of God's Holy Spirit, and yet it is needful above all else to every heart which seeks to be brought into captivity to the Law of Christ. For it is a main truth that God never can reign and triumph in a heart

which does not resign itself unreservedly to all the leadings of His Grace.

Perfect resignation must embrace three things. First, a complete acceptance of all inward moods alike, whether sweet or bitter, whether the heart feel itself, in David's words, "a beast before Thee," or full of light and consolation ; able for great things, or utterly incapable ; caressed or chastened of God.

Next, as to the body ; holy resignation accepts, with even mind, health or sickness ; the hundred little physical discomforts which make life wearisome to so many, or the most vigorous of constitutions ; mental stupidity and incapacity to enter deeply into sacred things, or the liveliest perceptions thereof ; a life spent in the sick-chamber, a useless burden to one's family or community, with the same willingness as the active independence of full strength. It accepts the praise of men without exultation, and their blame without depression. Lastly, perfect resignation is willing to see all its own plans and designs frustrated, even those which seemed to be most for God's Glory. It is hard for zealous Christians, whose great aim is to be consumed for God's Glory, to see all their plans overthrown by the malice of the world or the devil, but perfect resignation looks calmly on its own defeat, and is neither disheartened by failure nor elated by success.

§ II. The only thing which can give this evenness of mind, is a holy indifference which realizes that none of

these things are God, or can separate the soul from God. He Alone can satisfy the soul. His loss alone should really grieve it. Amid all possible joys and consolations, the heart needs to say, "This is not my rest." Then, and then only, you will pass through all earthly vicissitudes with that peace promised to him whose mind is stayed on God, and who trusteth in Him.

§ III. God tests the faithfulness of our hearts by frequent variation of circumstance and mood, and we see continually how unstable and heedless men are under these changing conditions of life. Strive not to depend upon any special condition, whether outward or inward ; take all that is good as alike a loan, and all that is evil as a mere floating shadow. Above all, remember that you are a whole burnt-offering, a sacrifice to God, Who is moulding and subduing your will by all these varying circumstances, and abide patiently in His Hand, accepting what He sets before you at the present moment, neither fretting over the past nor looking anxiously to the future.

§ IV. Resignation under temptation.

Do not be alarmed at the idea of being resigned under temptation. Many pious souls fret and excite themselves under its first assaults, so as seriously to injure their spiritual life. This may be purely natural impatience, or an ill-regulated desire for spiritual ease. I do not mean that you should take no steps to set yourself free from temptation ; this were contrary to the teaching of the faith. I

would have you pray, take advice, and use all judicious means to be freed, but calmly and without excitement, ready to bear on patiently if your efforts fail. But certain souls feel at times that God would have them bear temptation silently and in patient suffering. "In that day ye shall ask Me nothing" (John xvi. 23), and then it becomes them to abide, even as their Master, a lamb in the shearer's hands.

§ v. If you have done all that lies in your power, and yet the storm of temptation rages, then strive to wait in trust and confidence, and like to S. Paul when shipwrecked, "cast out your anchors, and wish for the day":—go down like Jonah "into the sides of the vessel," and wait. But if you lose your head, and grow restless and terrified, you will but add strength to the temptation, and weaken your own power of resistance.

§ vi. If temptation takes the form of horrible, loathsome imaginations, be at peace, confessing yourself to be vile earth and ashes. If you seem to be on the very edge of the precipice, and fear lest you fall into actual sin, bow meekly to the earth, clinging fast to God. If even you have fallen, doubtless you should strive for a penitence proportionate to your guilt, but even amid that you should aim at a calm spirit, believing that He Who holds you in His Hand has suffered your pride to fall, and is now drawing you out of the gulf into which your self-confidence fell.

§ VII. Adore God's Eternal Wisdom and Wise Dealing ; follow the path He points out unhesitatingly. It is enough that He leads you, whether you understand His leading or not. Give yourself up to Him ; His Tender Love will not lay more on you than you can bear. Woe is to him whom the " Father chasteneth not."

" Exult, O dust and ashes ! the Lord shall be thy part,
His only, His for ever, thou shalt be, and thou art !"

§ VIII. Resignation under spiritual desolation.

Amid all the Saviour's trials, none was so heavy as that wherein He felt Himself forsaken ; and so to His followers, all earthly trials and all sharp temptations are endurable while the soul is conscious of its inward stay and strength. Yet even this must be resigned, and you must be ready to say with the prophet Jeremiah, " I am pained at my very heart, . . . because thou hast heard, Oh my soul, the sound of the trumpet ; Destruction upon destruction is cried !" (iv. 19.) Your prayers may seem wholly unable to reach God's Ear ; you may feel hard and callous as a brute beast, your inner soul may be a gaping void. But accept it all. Be not only content to follow your Master before Pilate and Herod, or to the scourging and Cross—follow Him even to that bitter cry, " My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me !"

§ IX. Let it be your part to mortify your external life, while God mortifies the interior life, and when He lifts

His Hand from off you, and light and warmth once more gladden you, be wary, do not give yourself up over-hastily to enjoyment. Hold yourself ready to fall back into darkness if it be His Will. And may His Holy Spirit in all things direct, shape, and mould your heart, so as to make you serve to His Glory, and the Saviour's triumph.

XI

Amid all manner of crosses and temptations the soul should be trained to offer itself yet more.

§ I. **A** STRANGE form of consolation, you will say, and seemingly contradictory to what we are so often told, and which is suggested in books, namely, that we should strengthen the soul to endurance by the help of meditation on our sins, on eternity, and the Example of our Lord and His Saints. Assuredly such a remembrance is needful for all under suffering, nor is the path now suggested as a means of rising above suffering suitable to all souls. Many are too weak, too shrinking, but where you have to deal with a generous soul, capable of absolute self-renunciation, and moulded to endurance, you may venture to lead it to a height of self-devotion beyond the ordinary level.

§ II. It may be that the soul is plunged in the depths of self-reproach, in bitter remembrance of past sin ; let it

cast itself yet lower still, confessing that all and more is deserved. Or amid utter desolation and dryness, when God seems hopelessly afar off, let the soul offer itself never more to taste His sweetness if such be His Will. Or if its most treasured possessions are taken away, let it say with Job, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, naked shall I return thither : the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord." If the devil brings temptations to despair, be not afraid—let the soul give itself up to God's Justice, a willing victim. If slander and contempt fall heavily, let them be willingly received, as far less than is deserved. So doing, the actual suffering will be lightened, and the devil discomfited. It was in this spirit that S. Francis Xavier cried out, "More, yet more, Lord," amid his sharpest sufferings. By this means the soul will forget self and what it has to bear, and be absorbed in God, submitting all things, whether actual or possible, to His Holy Will.

XII

The perfection of sacrifice lies in self-surrender.

§ 1. **N**OT everyone is able to receive this precept —let those only who are able take it to themselves. It is not good to aim at too great things, and yet in one way you may well strive thereafter, and offer a

great and perfect sacrifice to God—and that is through a full surrender of all things, even in total desolation and bitterness of spirit. It is possible to offer oneself very truly to God, and yet not to be ready to accept the Cross in every shape, so as to be conformable to Jesus. But this must be accomplished, and still further, one must give oneself up to bear every trial, in all its bitterness, without any consolation. There is but one way of doing this, namely, looking to our Great Example, Who gave up everything till He hung naked upon the Cross, exposed to all that God and man could lay upon Him, His Heart flooded with bitterness so as to draw forth that cry of anguish, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!”

§ II. The first point in this sacrifice is the surrender of what we like. Now, there are many things which do not cost us much to give up, because our hearts do not specially cleave to them,—and we may make a great show of self-surrender without really drawing near to God, so long as we hold back that which is dearest to us. The object of putting aside earthly things, and making ourselves empty and bare, is that we may be filled and clothed upon by God our Fulness. But this must be done without reserve. So long as you hold back the one thing to which you cling, you are not really stripping yourself, making yourself bare; once give up that special thing, and with it you give all else.

Do not be vague and indefinite about this. The sur-

render must be twofold—actual and through the will. He who would do this must sacrifice the tenderest longings of the heart, and as far as is consistent with conscience and good sense all such society as calls forth and indulges the natural inclinations, so as to enjoy no rest or consolation save in God. There are other matters in which the surrender must be made rather in will than in deed, either through circumstances or because they would require too bold an effort. But God accepts all such attempts to prefer Him above all else. Endeavour to offer up everything, even your most sacred spiritual consolations and inward satisfactions ; make acts of willing acceptance, even of a seeming separation from God Himself, if it be His Will. Let your soul lie before Him ready to be despoiled of one thing after another, as He may see fit. Hard, indeed, it will be to nature, but the soul which is able to do this, and to possess God wholly and entirely, is indeed blessed above all others.

§ III. Remember that he who thus makes surrender of himself as a sacrifice to Jesus, must inevitably suffer. It cannot be otherwise—He brings the Cross with Him wheresoever He finds entrance ; He sets His seal upon the heart and body, and what mark save suffering can that seal impress ? He accepts the self-devoted soul as His bride, and it must partake of the Bridegroom's cup. Moreover, when Jesus accepts the offering, He becomes tenderly pitiless towards that favoured soul until all His merciful designs are wrought in it. And the soul some-

times can scarce bear His Hand, and cries out under It, as did Job, "Thou art become cruel to me, with Thy strong hand Thou opposest Thyself against me" (xxx. 21), yet He ceases not to wound until He has effected His loving purpose. In truth, to bear all this requires a great soul, moved with a great purpose.

§ IV. There is yet a further step in this sacrifice. Such trials can be better borne when the soul feels a warm, hearty generosity and self-devotion stirring within it; when realizing intensely the things pertaining to salvation. But when all is dull and dead within, when no sensible attraction to holiness is felt, when all seems repulsive and in the very gall of bitterness, then to accept every kind of cross and trouble,—this is, indeed, a proof that he who does it has gone far in the school of real self-sacrifice. To be able to say amid darkness and desolation, when God's Ear seems closed, "I KNOW that He hears me more than ever, that not one sigh is lost before Him—He wills to seem as though He were afar off, but I KNOW that He is nigh,"—this is a noble exercise of trust and faith. That is true faith which cleaves to God even when He seems to forsake His creature, and which does but multiply its self-oblation, in proportion as its desolation abounds. "Take all Thou wilt, my God, I give myself the more to Thee,—I thank Thee that Thou vouchsafest thus to give me a share in the agony, the desolation of Thine Only Son. Strike, wound,—I rejoice in the chastening of Thy Gracious Hand."

XIII

The Christian, as a temple of the Holy Ghost, must have great respect for himself.

§ 1. **T**HANKS be to Jesus, there is nothing on earth more worthy of veneration, more mysteriously holy than the Christian, yet men often fail to perceive the dignity committed to them, as temples of the Holy Ghost.

There are three manners of temples wherein God dwells and wills to be honoured : the temple of His Glory ; the material temples where the Blessed Saviour vouchsafes to repose upon our altars ; and man himself, the living temple of God. The two first are generally acknowledged, and given the reverence due to them, but the last is too often profaned, and we fail to perceive what a solemn thing it is to have God in His Majesty dwelling within our hearts. There is no need to prove that we are temples of the Holy Spirit,—everyone will grant this theoretically. Rather let us fix our thoughts on the nature of our consecration and on the duties involved thereby.

§ 11. Our material temples are consecrated, 1st, by the Bishop's hands ; and, by the Sacrifice of the Lamb of God upon our altars ; 3rd, by solemn chanting of psalms and hymns. Even so with ourselves, and well may we

cry out with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place!"—it is no mere body and soul, but it "is none other than the House of God." (Gen. xxviii. 17.)

Let us dwell upon the manner of our consecration. We are not set apart by the imposition of human hands as the Bishop is, but by Jesus Christ Himself, Who comes to anoint us, and Who is "the Bishop of our souls" (1 Pet. ii. 25). The chrism is His Precious Blood. The material temples of God receive an external superficial anointing, but ours is inward and all-prevailing. That Precious Blood consecrates heart, lips, eyes, every fibre of our frame. He dwells in us, "we are members of His Flesh and of His Bones" (Eph. iv. 30). S. Cyril says that as the Human Flesh of Jesus was divinely vivified by union with the Word, so through union with His Flesh we are admitted to share the life and the anointing of Divinity. And S. Thomas says that it is through the Body of Jesus Christ that we receive that anointing. "It shall come like oil into his bones." (Ps. cix. 17.)

§ III. Again, like the material temple, we are consecrated by the Unbloody Sacrifice of the Divine Lamb; and our heart is the altar. Thrice blessed is it to be the portion of God, the seat and stage of those gracious mysteries! In our churches the Holy Sacrifice is not indiscriminately offered, but only on the altar, and the altar is the centre-point which sanctifies the whole build-

ing. Even so God vouchsafes to dwell in our hearts, and thence to issue forth the sanctifying grace which purifies our will, and controls our whole outward bearing.

§ iv. Then, even as solemn chants are used in consecrating a material temple, so are we set apart with "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. iii. 16), and surely he who considers that he is the chosen dwelling-place of his God, says an early writer, "will break forth into irresistible songs of thanksgiving and delight."

§ v. Our duty to this temple.

And first, inasmuch as each of us is a living temple of God, we owe the same tribute to it as to the material temple His Church,—namely, respect, silence, and adoration. We show reverence to the entrance of our churches, and we expect their exterior to be seemly and well-ordered. Even so the countenance, the glances, the whole outward demeanour of the Christian should be composed and modest, because He Who in-dwelleth is God, and the outward token of that in-dwelling should be seen in a recollected, reverent bearing. The outward man is animated by the soul; it rules expression, glances, words, movements,—and thus the exterior of God's temple should betoken that His Throne is established within. God's stamp should be on your countenance, in your eyes, in your words, in every part of your outward bearing. "How dreadful is this place, this is the gate of

Heaven," should be written thereon. We need not to enter within a church to know that it is a consecrated building,—the exterior bears the unmistakeable token of its character. Even so the outward bearing of a Christian should leave no doubt on those around that God dwells within him,—his calm, reverent, recollected manner should betoken that he remembers Whose temple he is. Who that keeps this ever before him, that reflects how God is in him and around him, but will strive earnestly that no word or action or look be unworthy that Presence?

§ VI. Again, as to silence. We pay this tribute of reverence to our churches, out of respect to their sacred character; why not to our inner sanctuary? Holy men have always sought this special form of recollection, weighing their words, avoiding useless and idle words, remembering that He Who dwells in them is grieved by our careless and superfluous conversation. There is an inner silence, too, to be cultivated. If a poor peasant were brought before a king in all his state, he would be awe-struck and silent, and what else are we before the Incomprehensible Majesty of God?

§ VII. Then as to adoration. He who ever looks upon himself as a temple consecrated to God, will maintain a constant spirit of inward adoration, prostrating and pouring himself out before the Infinite Greatness Which is so near, even as the saints and angels cease not to cast

themselves down before the Throne, adoring the Everlasting Son.

§ VIII. Remembering, then, that we are the sanctuary and altar of God, anointed with the Precious Blood, one with the Body of our Lord, does it not behove us to maintain a deep reverence for the body He has given us, to cultivate silence and recollection, and a spirit of perpetual adoration? Yet how continually we profane it both outwardly and inwardly, by dissipated thoughts, lightness or impurity, wandering glances, indulged appetites, curious ears, ease-loving members. Is this consistent with the belief that we are living temples of the Holy Ghost, an altar whereon Jesus lies? Too often the inner heart is like that Jewish Temple which our Lord said was turned into a den of thieves; the scene of extravagant imaginations, passion, jealousy, murmuring, suspicion, ambition, meanness, human respect. God sees all these marring His holy place, and yet He bears with it! Be it yours to drive out all such profanation, to attain that spirit of purity and adoration which alone is worthy of God's Holy Presence, and to shew forth in all you do and say that you are filled with His Majesty, consecrated to Him, partaking of His Divine Nature.

BOOK III

Maxims for those who have entered the Unitive Way

I

When God leads a soul by extraordinary paths the Director must deal very cautiously with it.

§ 1. **G**OD'S extraordinary gifts are like a fragrant perfume which evaporates when cast upon the breeze ; or a secret which ceases to be one when it is made known to various people ; or a hidden treasure which will soon be rifled if it is exposed to the gaze of the multitude. The special favours with which a soul is graced are a perfume from the Bridegroom to be savoured in seclusion ; a secret not to be revealed ; a treasure hid in the depths of the soul. It is a grievous thing to blight these by displaying them to the glare of day ; and yet often those to whom they are given do not know how to possess them in thankful stillness, and some directors are very incautious in tearing aside the veil which should shroud all such

gifts, either from inexperience or from too great indulgence towards those they guide. But there is an obvious danger in this of fostering a pride which is all the more difficult to deal with that it is very subtle, and often cloaked by a specious humility. Moreover, a wise director's aim is to humble the soul he guides, and if he makes it apparent that he thinks much of the special graces with which God favours his penitent, his attempts at humiliation and subjection will only be looked upon as trials of patience, not as any proof that he really esteems him but little. In short, the director who reveals such hidden treasures to his penitent, destroys them by the very act, teaching him self-complacency, and before one single breath of that they are sure to vanish utterly.

§ II. God would have the soul He favours unconscious of what He is doing, so that His leadings may be perfectly free ; whereas self-consciousness hinders simple obedience. Moreover, the lonely soul makes ceaseless efforts to purify itself more and more, which is the surest way to preserve God's Grace, and to acquire yet more. Be sure that all special favours are safest when known only to God and one's director, and they are poisoned so soon as the recipient is conscious of them. A wise director will take very little apparent notice of such things ; he will listen to their details almost coldly, and when once thoroughly laid before him, he will not allow

them to be constantly dwelt upon either in conversation or writing. He may at times see it well to depreciate such communications, although he will require them to be made even when extravagant, as a matter of discipline. It is profitable, too, to set before one so favoured the far greater graces which have been poured out upon others. In short, nothing should be neglected which will tend to keep the penitent in a humble mind, and to prevent him from self-exaltation.

§ III. It may be asked whether it is possible for anyone to be led by these extraordinary ways, and not know it? Most possible, and of daily occurrence. Those whom God is leading by special trials and temptations have no idea that they are enduring anything great; God wills them to drink His Cup unhindered by any particle of self-esteem. If He deprives them of light and comfort, they simply believe themselves unworthy of His sunshine. Divine simplicity is incapable of perceiving what it really is in itself; and those souls which are most favoured of God are farthest from imagining themselves to be in any way different from others. Again, it may be asked whether, when such a soul is troubled as to its own condition, we ought not to make known the gracious secret? But as a rule it is wiser to let such a person bear with anxiety and fearfulness, so as the better to learn self-renunciation and resignation to God's Guidance, or at most, only to reassure and quiet him as to his con-

dition. Let us beware lest while meaning to promote our penitent's sanctification, we do but promote his destruction.

II

The soul which is striving after union with God must be wholly detached from all else.

§ 1. **T**HIS does not refer to detachment from things criminal in themselves, or even to mere natural clingings, but to those which the most spiritually minded are apt to make for themselves, and which, while innocent to ordinary souls, are hindrances to such as are called to the highest kind of union with God.

Such souls should be detached from all earthly stay, however innocent, good, or holy, if they really hope to attain to the perfection of that union. All save God is vile and intolerable to one so enlightened. Even an over-earnest attachment to direction, as though all were lost in the absence of a cherished director, may often lead to an ill-regulated feeling, which leads people to cling unduly and with a too earthly affection to a human guide. Or again, some rest much upon their own efforts, prayers, and meditations, authorities, rules, and the like, as though their spiritual progress depended wholly on such

practices. Such a mistake leads to irritation and resistance when it is needful to interfere with these pious exercises, either through charity, obedience, or necessity.

Or it may be that the soul clings overmuch to its own light and knowledge, or the witness of a good conscience, —a fertile source of complacency and self-deceit, which is apt to end in trusting self more than God. Then, if that light be overshadowed, or conscience perplexed, such a soul grows disheartened and falls away.

A third dangerous clinging to which the most spiritual persons are exposed, is to a certainty concerning their interior condition, desiring to know positively what their precise spiritual state is, and resting with satisfaction in it. Of course to a certain extent self-knowledge is good and necessary, but God would have us content with a certainty that we wish to do His Will, and does not grant us positive evidence as to our precise attitude in the life of grace. A good director will watch over these dangers.

§ II. God is a Jealous God : He burns up and destroys all that whereon the soul leans rather than on Him. If a penitent clings unduly to an earthly guide, He Who wills Himself to be the Supreme Director of souls, often puts the earthly prop aside. Or if the penitent rests overmuch on his spiritual exercises, God not unfrequently raises impediments to frequent communion, or permits health or other hindrances to interfere with prayer, penance, and observance of rule. Then the penitent becomes down-

cast and unhappy, because the fabric whereon his self-esteem rested is destroyed ; but the while God is teaching him to rest solely on Himself.

Or perhaps the person in question rests satisfied in the light and peace of his own conscience ; and then God disturbs that by temptation, so as to bring him to His Feet for all rest. Or he finds his mainstay in measuring himself by spiritual books or the opinions of holy men, and then God allows that prop to be upset by mental perplexities and scruples, by irresolution and doubt.

A good director is of priceless value, God's gifts are most precious, a satisfied mind much to be desired. But God is Greater than all these, and so soon as the soul prefers any of them to Him, He avenges Himself. He will not be supplanted by any of His gifts in His child's heart.

§ III. Why God deprives His chosen ones of the earthly objects to which they cling.

It is unworthy of one to whom God offers the treasures of His Grace to be kept back from their full appreciation by earthly ties and clings ; and we know that the most trivial imperfection, if voluntary, may come between the heart and God's Gracious Favour. There is an inherent corruption in human nature which, like a canker worm, eats into the heart of all we do, unless it be diligently watched and resisted, and thus a slight and seemingly innocent earthly attachment sometimes influences a

person's whole life, and mars their best actions, leading to neglect of His Presence as the first thought, and hindering a perfect union with Him.

§ iv. It may be that God deprives you of the director on whom you leant with so much comfort. Most likely you were deriving more harm than good from him, by resting on him rather than on his Master. Or you find yourself unable to fulfil your wonted religious exercises ; God saw that you were growing more attached to your own little habits of devotion than to Him ; that your observances fostered self-love and a good opinion of yourself, and therefore He withdraws you from what has become a snare. Or you are deprived of the light, the sweetness you once felt, and even of that repose of conscience in which you had trusted ; because God intends to teach you in bareness and desolation to look to Him only, to go on to the end instead of halting in the means.

There is no duty which God sets more urgently before His creatures than that of a thorough recognition of His absolute dominion over them. This is the key-note of our service, and he who has attained to this, will bear everything, even fear and doubts, in silence and with a detached spirit. Not that it is wrong to lay such doubts and fears before your director ; on the contrary, you are bound to do so, but if he does not or cannot relieve you, then be still, and accept them in a reverent spirit of holy

fear. Some excellent people fail grievously in this respect; they torment their directors with an endless repetition of the same troubles, and, if still unsatisfied, they seek for other advice on all sides, in a most unrecollected, sometimes disobedient fashion. Strive by all means to know God's Will, but do not be presumptuous in an obstinate search after what He sees fit to conceal. What are you, that you should claim an immediate manifestation of His Will as your right? Seek to know it honestly and diligently, and leave the rest to Him, lest you be really resisting Him, and shrinking from a blind, humble dependence on Him. In short, to sum up, use the help of creatures faithfully—they are God's messengers, and you are not meant to be your own guide—be as diligent in religious exercises as though your salvation depended on them; accept the lights God deigns to pour upon your soul with loving delight; but do not misuse any of these gifts by stopping short in them, rather than in God. Be ready to resign them all if it be His Will, strive to attain a spirit of true detachment, even from these divine blessings, and while using God's gifts, let your only clinging attachment be to Him, the Giver.

III

A good Director will ascertain and promote the special leading God vouchsafes to individual souls.

§ I. **T**HIS is unquestionably a most important duty on a director's part ; and one that involves not merely guiding each person according to their special position and state in life, but yet a step farther ; and having ascertained what are the hidden movements and leadings of each individual soul, he must strive to guide that soul towards the particular form of perfection for which God gives it a special attraction.

§ II. There are certain precepts set before all men by God and His Church, from which no one can be exempt. Those who adopt the religious life, pledge themselves to aim at the counsels of perfection, and as S. Bernard says, that wherein he was before free, now becomes incumbent on him. And there is further an inner rule of perfection given to certain souls, written by God's Finger upon their secret heart. Experience tells us that this is by no means the case with everyone. The greater number of Christians are subject only to the above-mentioned precepts, the greater number of religions to their own rule and vows, but among both classes there are from time to time those whom God calls to seek a higher and more special perfec-

tion, and it is the director's part to find out and help such as these.

§ III. How is such an attraction or leading to be defined? Perhaps the best definition is, a call from God to some special and unusual state of conscience. Thus one person may be drawn to bodily austerity, another to continual recollection, a third to solitude and separation from human ties, a fourth to the love of humiliations, a fifth to fervent love of Jesus or to special devotion to the Majesty of God, and so forth. Any of these or the whole may be the special attraction of a soul, the object to which God is continually leading it.

Bear in mind that this call may be variously made. Sometimes it is a clear voice speaking within,—more often it is a secret inclination and tendency with which the whole soul is so filled that it is unconsciously drawn in that direction. Or it may be that the call comes in the form of strong light, great sweetness, or a wounded heart. It may not always come in the same form to the same person—but may be changed by the breath of God's Holy Spirit. The soul is liable to constant vicissitudes, even as the clouds pass over the sky, and S. Teresa says that where this is not the case there is cause for misgiving.

§ IV. These inner moods are liable to many mistakes and disguises. The director will be able to test them, and the source whence they spring, 1st, by their lasting

steadily ; 2nd, by the preponderating weight of any such impression ; 3rd, by finding the soul unable to heed aught else ; 4th, by its perpetual, involuntary recurrence thereto ; 5th, by the fervour with which it cleaves to that special thing ; and, lastly, by the soul's peacefulness and calmness, which must always be the work of God's Holy Spirit. Such tests as these will safely prove that the call is no mere work of the imagination.

§ v. The next consideration is how to lead the soul by this appointed path to perfection, taking care not to disturb, but rather to second, God's designs. The director should confirm his charge in following God's leadings, and adapt his treatment to them. "The servant is not greater than his Lord," and the Lord's dealings must be a law to His priest, who should hold his own office in great reverence, remembering that to him is entrusted the handling of God's choicest work—the sanctification of souls. God treats the souls of His children with a loving care, which might almost be called reverence, and surely it becomes the director to be most watchful in his dealings, so as to promote, not thwart, His Master's aim. His object must be to find out how God is leading that soul, and not to carry out his own notions with respect to it. It is unwise to try and force men's minds to a higher level than they are capable of attaining,—still more unwise is it when directors, as we sometimes see, try overmuch to build on a foundation of

their own, rather than to content themselves with removing obstacles so that God may build as He will. The director should "make the rough places plain," and prepare the way for the Lord's work. Remember that all spiritual growth in your penitent's heart is the Lord's work, not yours; you can do but little, He can do all. You must also prevent the soul you are guiding from resting satisfied with anything it can do in its own behalf. He will be the best and wisest guide of souls who ever looks to God's Holy Spirit as the One Great Director, watching for His inspirations, and heedfully obeying them; while he who trusts to his own skill and experience is not unlikely to go astray, and mislead his penitents; it is "the blind leading the blind, and both will fall into the ditch" (Matt. xv. 14).

IV

Those who have entered the unitive way must be helped to give up all independent action.

§ 1. **T**O this end it is necessary to ascertain what souls are in the unitive way; for inexperienced or excitable directors are apt to make mistakes and hinder the real progress of their penitents, by treating them as having entered upon this path before they really attain to it. Now, there are certain tests which you may safely

apply. 1st. Has the person in question mortified all sensual and earthly inclinations, or is he undisciplined and liable to break forth in natural feelings, likings, or other demonstrations? Union with God implies death to self in all its forms. 2ndly. Observe whether this person is liable to fail in temper. Not, of course, that anyone will be perfect, but he who is really in union with God does not often fall very grievously, inasmuch as his mind becomes one with the Mind of God. 3rdly. See whether he is governed by Divine Grace—those who are in union with God are led by the Spirit of God, and all their actions partake of that influence.

§ II. Next we must ask why it is necessary to check independent action in such souls? And to this the answer is, that all savouring of self comes as a cloud, a barrier between God and man, and hinders perfect union. A man's voluntary action checks God's action in him. We are apt to work restlessly and busily;—God works slowly and quietly. He brings about His intentions by almost imperceptible degrees, and the more entirely a soul is given up to Him to be moulded and stamped, the closer will be that union.

§ III. The question arises next, how and when to check independent action? In order to meet this, you must study what are the conditions under which persons are most apt to use and trust in their voluntary exertions. One of these is when God hides His Light awhile, and

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the penitent struggles with head and heart to fill up the blank for himself, unable to bear it patiently. Or again, after a certain season of patient waiting, some people grow weary and impatient, and seek to help themselves by multiplying acts and efforts. Or sometimes, having tasted God's Grace, the soul is not content to accept it thankfully, but must needs try to add its own exertions. In all these cases a wise director will try to lead such a soul to "wait upon the Lord"—to be silent when God does not will to speak; to maintain a listening, reverent attitude, ever the fittest for receiving His Grace. Stillness and silence are God's chosen times, and the greatest marvels of grace are worked in silence. Grace enters and fills our souls imperceptibly; Christ comes to us in the Blessed Sacrament with but two or three whispered words of consecration. Be sure that those who live the life of the Spirit will above all things seek self-restraint even in spiritual matters, and will ever study to win and maintain a holy calmness and self-renunciation.

V

It is sometimes profitable to the soul to be left awhile to its troubles.

§ I. **T**HIS is a point which it is necessary to consider in order to counteract the eagerness with which people usually seek to escape from all inward perturbation, as also the over-great tenderness which leads many excellent guides of souls to spare no pains in relieving any such troubles—a tenderness which sometimes is more hurtful to their penitent than severity would be. Of course it requires great discretion in the director to know when to apply such bracing discipline, as there are many souls quite unable to bear it, and to these he cannot show too great indulgence and care in calming and soothing their spiritual distress; but there are two classes of minds for whom it is profitable to drink the cup of inward bitterness to the dregs—some among mere beginners in the spiritual life, others who have made great progress therein.

§ II. Concerning beginners.

Those who are really converted, and turn sincerely to God, are apt to be grievously troubled by the memory of past sin, which haunts them with an overpowering sense of shame and grief, followed by cruel remorse, which

besets the conscience day and night, and an overwhelming dread of God's Judgment, akin to despair, when they think of His Inflexible Justice and their own guilt. A good director will act the part of pilot through this storm, not attempting to silence wind and wave, but carefully guarding against shipwreck, so that while his penitent cries out, "All Thy waves and storms are gone over me!" he may also be able to say, "It is good for me that I have been troubled."

§ III. God wills that those who turn heartily to Him should be purified from all the stains of their past life, and in proportion to His designs for the soul's perfection, so will often be the sharpness of this purification. And in all the purificative way, nothing is more cleansing than the inward suffering caused by past sin, which is as a fire by which God burns away the rust and dross of the soul. Be it your part as director to let this purification be accomplished to the full. If you take the metal from out the furnace before the melting process is completed, that dross may never be purged. You must try to maintain that holy severity with which God chastens His children, and not put out your hand to stay the rod in premature indulgence until the gracious work of purgation be accomplished. You must teach your penitent to bear the chastisement with a generous courage, remembering that after heaviness cometh joy, even the joy of possessing God Himself.

§ iv. Our Lord has said, "Thou shalt not come out thence until thou hast paid the uttermost farthing," and a good director will not hinder the fulfilment of this due justice. But if we consider the subject calmly, how few among us really adore the Justice of God. Of all His Attributes, this it is to which we pay least homage, because such homage consists in crosses, temptations, inward trials; and we all would fain be quit of these. Everyone invokes God's Goodness and Mercy, but none His Divine Justice. Doubtless it is lawful to seek to avert God's scourge, and it were most presumptuous to condemn those that do so; but there have been noble hearts which felt that death is the season of Mercy, and life should be given up to Justice, thus freely accepting all things from God's Justice here, while believing steadfastly in His Mercy hereafter.

§ v. Again, you should strengthen your penitent to bear his anguish bravely, by reminding him that it is fitting to find an instrument of chastisement in that which has been the instrument of sin; and for the most part, a man's imagination is the focus of his sin. Satan uses it as his great stage for wrong-doing, and then God suffers it to be the scene of chastisement and due repentance. Moreover, such spiritual troubles are often sent to counteract the pride which is incidental to one who having turned to God and tasted His Sweetness, imagines himself to be doing some great thing; and a wise director keeps before

him, as a main object, the cultivation of a humble spirit in those committed to his charge.

§ VI. Still more is such a course necessary with respect to persons whose type of holiness is beyond the common. It may be that while seeming to hide His Face, God is perfecting their training in purity. The seed men sow in autumn needs winter's frost and snow to prosper its growth, and in like manner the sharp biting chill of spiritual desolation is sometimes needed to preserve the precious seed of that Christian life which S. Paul says "is hid with Christ in God" (Col. iii. 3). The special grace of this life is often concealed under darkness and dryness, which preserve him who possesses it from undue exaltation. S. Paul was himself an instance of this, for although caught up to the third heaven, and given to hear unspeakable words, he was "buffeted by a messenger of Satan, lest he should be exalted above measure." Beware, lest by hastily relieving your penitent of any such thorns, you foster his pride, and cause him to fall.

§ VII. Again, these trials are often merely a preparation for fresh Divine favours. The earth that has been well harrowed and sifted will bring forth the most abundant crop, and dryness and desolation often precede God's renewed graces. He has ever dealt thus with His saints. S. Teresa says, speaking of herself, such trials are sent that they may receive His gracious visits the more fitly; for even as a poor peasant girl, if raised to the throne,

would be shamefaced and modest amid her new honours, so the soul humbled by trial, receives God's favours as wholly undeserved, and coming solely from the superabundance of His Grace.

§ VIII. Those who are called to bear such desolating trials are permitted to have a very special part in our Dear Lord's desolation and hidden sorrows. You, as a wise director, should lead such persons to realize and rejoice in this blessing, rather than turn it aside by injudicious consolation. Probably, if you feel unable to understand or deal with such cases, which are often both startling and trying, it might be well that you should humbly but firmly give them up into more competent hands, lest you hurt their and your own soul.

There is occasionally a time when such trials reach an extremity in which the wisest and best director seems to be merely a hindrance, and the troubled soul cries out with Job, "Miserable comforters are ye all;"—And then surely it is well to do as Job's friends did, when "None spake a word unto him, for they saw that his grief was very great."

VI

It does not necessarily follow that an incapacity to remember and sorrow for past sin, is the sign of a bad disposition.

§ 1. A FEW words on this subject may be useful, because some worthy souls are troubled at finding themselves unable to recall their past sins with any active sense of sorrow, and there are spiritual guides who fall into the error of treating such persons wrongly, by assuming that they are impenitent or indifferent.

There are four classes of people who do not readily remember or grieve for past sin. First, those who having sinned greatly, and being pursued by remorse, shake off all painful recollection of what is gone, in order to obtain a false peace. Clearly such as these do but add to their sin. Next, there are persons whose life has been very free from marked sin, and they cannot mourn over what does not exist. A third class have a conscience dulled by actual vice, or by the whirl and throng of earthly cares and occupations; and this blindness to past sin is wrong, because it arises from what is capable of control. But there is a fourth class of persons who having once offended God very grievously, and having been converted by His Mercy, are now leading a holy life, and who find themselves unable to dwell with what they consider due contrition upon their past sins, or even, it may

be, upon such sin as they are still committing from time to time. Such people are greatly troubled when coming to confession; they try to excite contrition by recalling the past, and cannot, or they fail to feel any personal sense of sin, and thence they infer that they are forsaken of God, and given up to a reprobate mind. Now, it is this class that needs to be carefully dealt with, for their condition is very often not merely innocent, but one of great grace.

§ II. There are souls which have attained to so entire a loss of self through union with God, as to have no thought or movement save through Him; and who dwell so entirely with and in Him as to be unable to fix their mind upon their sins, or who are so occupied in His work as to produce a like result. Others again, are so watchful in striving to sanctify every impulse of their heart that, on the rare occasions when they fall, their faults are instantly put away and forgotten. Such persons are surely led by God, but they are often troubled to think that they are strangely blind to their own faults. Yet, inasmuch as it is neither vanity, neglect, indolence, nor pride which blinds them, they cannot be blamed for what they would gladly alter, were they able.

If you are called upon to deal with any such souls, teach them that there are two kinds of sorrow for sin—one a sensible sorrow, which produces a conscious emotion, and which, belonging as it does to the lower part of our

nature, may be deficient without any fault of theirs. But the other sorrow abides in the will, which abhors sin, and this is indispensable to all who would lead a holy life.

It may be that all earthly efforts to excite contrition in the soul will fail, because God has reserved to Himself the power to touch the hearts of His children when and how He will. He comes when least expected, He strikes and wounds when unlooked for, and sets the fulness of sin and its humiliation before the soul just when it fancied itself freest from all guilt. One ray of His Heavenly Light will show this in plainer and more overwhelming characters than all human skill or eloquence united.

VII

The truest peace is found in abiding peacefully where God places us.

§ 1. **N**OT unfrequently those who aim at perfection distract their attention from the real work in hand by giving way to numberless cares and desires which are not to the purpose. They wish for the very things which they have not, they give way to useless regrets over what cannot be recalled, or they fret about a future which is wholly beyond our control, and meanwhile they neglect that which should absorb their whole mind, the actual present moment and its duties. All

guides of souls must be continually meeting with such cases. Indeed, people are so prone to be dissatisfied with what they possess, and to fancy anything else preferable, that sometimes we find them uneasy at their very peace and rest, as though it were a sign that God had forgotten them ! Such minds are always murmuring against God's dealings with their souls, always fretful, plaintive, disquieted ; they complain that they make no progress, that their troubles are ill-timed, and do not tend to sanctification ; they are fretted by the good they see in others, but do not possess themselves, and while running hither and thither after their own fanciful visions of perfection, they lose all mental rest. Depend upon it, true peace and perfection are only to be found by patient abiding in that condition wherein God has placed us, in spiritual as in temporal things.

§ II. But here let us guard against misapprehension, as this applies only to inevitable conditions, and not such as depend upon our own free will. Now, these troublous conditions which we cannot alter are of two kinds, external and internal. Among the first come such trials as sickness, harassing business, persecution, the troubles of poverty, domestic tyranny or ingratitude ; while among the second we may class temptation, dryness, seeming to be forsaken of God, incapacity of thinking anything good, and the like. The will has no power over such trials as these, and he who would be at peace and attain to per-

fection, must learn to abide patiently under whichever is laid upon him, striving to accept it willingly and without losing the grace it brings, by fretting under it.

§ III. Every earnest mind will be ready to grant that our chief aim should be to abide where God has placed us, and that it cannot be well with us save where He wills us to be, all our misfortunes arising because we stray from this Divine Will. And if so, it follows that the sickness, or loss, or temptation, or spiritual dryness, which troubles you just now, is precisely the condition in which God wills you to be at the present time, and that wherein your safety lies. If then, you are sick, strive to accept sickness as better for you than the strongest health; if despised, welcome contempt as more profitable than any possible praise of men. If you have to bear heavy losses, believe that they will turn to a priceless treasure. If you are tempted, or dry and lifeless in spirit, be sure that that dryness will fertilize your soul. If you feel as though God were absent from you, accept the exile as better for you than the glow of His conscious Presence. If you are overwhelmed with inevitable but harassing business, submit, believing that you may come nearer to God thus than in the most restful solitude. Do not seek to alter your condition. Be like a little child who cannot walk, and so remains tranquilly where his mother places him, certain that she will not leave him uncared for.

§ IV. Look upon your present condition as a cross, to

which God Himself has nailed you ; fix your mind steadfastly on using it to the best possible purpose, otherwise you will not win its real blessing. He who heartily and entirely makes this his rule cannot be greatly troubled by anything ; he is content with the existing state of things, and refrains from indulging any contrary wishes. All his happiness lies in God's Will, and with the eye of faith he sees his Father's Hand in every circumstance, however contrary to his natural likings.

§ v. The one aim of all seeking and willing should be God. All that is not God must be a matter of indifference. One who is really obedient to an earthly superior does not pause to weigh time, or place, or circumstance, in obeying ; looking only to the will of his superior, he simply acts upon it. And thus all our conditions, external or internal—joy or sorrow, peace or war, darkness or light, toil or rest, warmth or chillness, all should be alike, since all come from our Great Superior's Hand. A blind man does not dwell upon the objects surrounding him, he holds fast to his guide, and goes on in the only safe way he knows. Be sure that the actual condition in which God places you represents His Will to you for the time being. Temptation is His Voice to you, sickness is His Voice to you ; dryness, darkness, or temptation carry the stamp of His Divine Will. Surely this is enough to uphold you thankfully amid the greatest trials ?

§ vi. To sum up ; He who seeks God only, abides

gladly and with a holy thankfulness in the condition in which he finds himself, because it is there that God is to be found by him, and not elsewhere. Therefore let it be your aim to say continually, "I would have things as they are, I have no wish for anything different. If my actual condition is one of trial, I adore that trial; if I am chastened, I cherish my chastisement, and would rather submit to it than to any delights; if I am weighed down with woe and wretchedness, I will rejoice therein more than in the most abundant consolations, because it is God's Will." Train the souls you guide to feel thus, and never be weary of pitying and teaching those whose blindness or impatience makes them despise the actual blessings they possess in order to run after that which is withheld from them.

VIII

We must not be surprised at the occasional falls of those who have made great progress in holiness.

§ 1. **M**AY God's Holy Spirit comfort all such as, after long perseverance in holiness, have been overtaken and fallen. Sad indeed, is the case of such persons, and woe is them if they are in the hands of an unwise or inexperienced director—one whose views are narrow, who is not well versed in God's dealings, or

who is not clear-sighted. A narrow-minded man, or one who does not understand the manifold workings of the human heart, cannot understand such a fall, or treat it rightly.

The director who has to deal with such cases needs a warm large heart; he must be ready to hear of great sin without amazement, he must be able to encourage and strengthen his penitent, who may be well-nigh overcome with shame and despair. God forbid that we should so misuse our office as to add to the sorrows we are intended to heal. We are not so much the ministers of God's Justice, as of His Mercy. He who would meet such cases with tender compassion and help, must remember that human weakness exceeds all we can express, and that those who are pre-eminent in goodness are not exempt from such weakness; that the holiest may fall to the lowest depth, and that none are kept from falling save by the wholly undeserved Grace of God. The director must bethink him that he himself might fall even lower, did not God's Powerful Loving Mercy hold him up; nay, that he may any day fall, for he dare not think that he deserves such upholding Grace.

§ II. If he be a man of experience and tenderness, the director will go yet farther in comforting those who fall. He will reflect that perhaps in the hour of temptation the sinning soul was left in a manner to itself, because God, Who never really withdraws His Grace, sometimes

leaves the soul seemingly to itself, in order to cure it of all tendency to self-satisfaction, and to teach it what are the sad results of its own weakness. He will remember that sometimes God visits His chosen ones with a sudden thunderbolt, in order to dash them down from a perilous elevation, nothing being more displeasing to God than pride because of His favours. Moreover, an experienced director knows that a serious fall is sometimes the means of leading God's children to great perfection; and that because for the rest of their lives they are, as it were, prostrate before Him, their sin is ever before them, humbling them to the very dust; and this is a great means towards holiness. He knows, too, that God is a Jealous God, Who avenges Himself on those who do not sufficiently correspond to the Grace He gives by some severe and humiliating correction.

§ III. Origen says that God is not content to leave His chosen ones in the ordinary easy paths of holiness; the bulk of the flock may be left to follow a straight road, without any special hindrances, but those destined to great things are called apart, and led by strange rude ways, that they may learn how entirely they are children of adoption. There is as much difference, he goes on to say, between the life and guidance of such souls and ordinary persons, as between a monarch and his subjects. But if these favoured souls do not correspond to His Grace, then He visits them in His wrath, by leaving them

to themselves, by temptation, or by permitting them to fall grievously.

God would have filled His child with His Own Ineffable Sweetness, and now that ungrateful child has despised it ; therefore he is left to himself, and becomes a prey to desolation and misery.

God would have shielded Him with a strong buckler from all his enemies ;—but he chose to walk in his own strength, and now he is left to cower weakly and helplessly under temptation.

God would have led him gently on towards perfection, imparting His Own Purity and Grace to him : he failed to correspond to such Grace, and he has fallen into shameful sin.

Do not imagine, S. Bernard says, addressing some such, that you will be allowed to rest in a common-place holiness. God's grace calls you to something higher, and you must meet it half way, or He will smite you. If you will not be lifted up, He will cast you down. The nearer you are to God, the more He requires of you.

Again, God sometimes allows those who are destined to govern others to fall grievously, as S. Theresa observes, in order that they may learn by experience to be tender and pitiful towards their brethren's faults. All these, and many similar thoughts, with which God inspires a director's heart, will tend to give him a fathomless depth of pity for those who, till now holy, have fallen

grievously. Woe be to the narrow cold hearts which can only deal out harshness and severity in their mistaken zeal. Of a truth, in all such cases the director needs a mother's tenderness, but a tenderness blended with firmness. Remember too, never to betray the least astonishment at what is told you ; any such sign on your part may repulse and hinder the troubled conscience which is laid open to you.

§ iv. As to the treatment of such a penitent, Do not speak harshly to him—he is already overwhelmed with shame, both by his sin itself and his voluntary confession thereof. Be it your part to share his confusion, and to relieve it by kindness and consideration. Beware of a single hard or crushing word. He is ready to despair ; your aim must be to open before him the unlimited Mercies of God. Do not try to deepen his contrition by dwelling upon the greatness of his fall ; you may thereby increase his distress, not his real sorrow for sin. As to the penance to be laid upon him, it is always necessary to remember that penance, to be useful, must be adapted to the individual, to his special sins, his bodily strength, and the nature of his sorrow for what he has done. All these points must be weighed in order to a judicious discipline.

IX.

Jesus Christ must reign Alone in the soul.

§ I. **I**T is not hard to prove the rights of our Divine King. No man is a king by nature ; all are created alike, but Jesus is essentially a King by nature, as He is by the free gift of God the Father. Earthly kings have been elected by their people, but Jesus is the Anointed of His Father. Earthly monarchs have won their crown by war and conquest—sometimes unjust conquest—Jesus has won His by His Blood. Let us consider how far His Kingdom reaches over us, how He reigns, and how men rebel against him.

§ II. What is Christ's Kingdom? Do not seek His Kingdom in the visible world, where earthly monarchs reign. His Kingdom is one where none else can enter in—the hidden depths of the conscience, inaccessible to all save Jesus ; a precious mine in truth, but one, alas, little known to us ourselves. Earthly kings are wont to hold their court in some central point of their territory, thence the better to wield and influence their subjects, and even so Jesus has set up His Throne, in the midst of men, in our heart. There it is that He rules, inspires, and stamps everything with His Own Impress. From thence He issues forth His mandates, whether He calls

us to the hidden life, or to an exterior life of charity and zeal ; whether He chides our faithlessness, or soothes us with His caressing Love. Ask your own heart, and you will find that so it is. How great a reverence then, we ought to entertain for the heart where our Sovereign Lord dwells ; how deep should be the recollection and fervour with which we deal with it.

§ III. Earthly kingdoms have their extreme boundaries, to which the prince's rule extends, and in Christ's Kingdom these are represented by the body, the senses, every action however trivial—while within He must rule over every power and passion. He wills to rule over all without exception ; eyes and tongue, our most passing word, our most trivial action, are alike subject to His Law. The most unimportant hamlet is subject to its king as well as the largest town ; and no part of our life, act, or thought is too small to be ruled by our Heavenly King. Let us be willing slaves, ready to give up all human respect and self-will.

§ IV. Earthly monarchs exact tribute at certain appointed seasons, but our Sovereign Jesus requires a ceaseless tribute, in that He would have our every action, every motion of our heart to be offered to Him.

An earthly king is content to make one triumphal entry into his kingdom, but this Dear Lord Jesus continually renews His coming into our heart in Holy Communion, thereby strengthening His royal rights and our

loyalty. It is in the heart that He reigns above all. S. Cyprian says, that though Jesus rules over brain, eyes, and hands, it is in the heart that He has set up His throne; and therefore we ought to recollect ourselves, and enter within the recesses of our own hearts with deep reverence, striving to behold our Monarch on His Judgment-seat therein.

Again, earthly monarchs are wont to commit the charge of their distant territories to vice-regents, who are in no wise possessors of those lands, but who hold them merely in trust. Even so with us. Our mind, speech, eyes, all our faculties and powers, are but so many trusts committed to us, to be warily guarded, so that the enemy may not abuse them. Thus S. Paul says to Timothy, "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost, Which dwelleth in us" (2 Tim. i. 14). If a viceroy were to take possession of the province committed to him as his own, we should esteem him guilty of treason; and in like manner you betray your Monarch's trust if you use your body or its faculties as your own, or to your own selfish purposes.

§ v. How does Jesus reign in us? Earthly kings depend for all their greatness upon the greatness of their people; but Jesus is glorified by His people's nothingness. Earthly kings draw their revenue from their subjects' wealth; but Jesus would have His people poor. He obscures men's own light, their own clings and in-

clinations, in order that He Alone may reign supreme in them. Not that He would have His subjects lifeless or idle, but He would have them pure, devoid of self-seeking, ready to accept the stamp of His Own Royal Mint.

§ VI. Earthly monarchs are rarely accessible ; they are hedged in by official ceremony and etiquette, it may be prejudiced by favouritism. But our Heavenly King is easy of access to all ; He gives Himself to each one of us, as though no other living soul had any claim upon Him. No need for us to penetrate through ranks of guards, or to propitiate 'favourites ; we are ever able and welcome to approach Him in His Blessed Sacrament. He is never weary of listening to all we have to say ; and lest His Glory and Majesty should overwhelm our feeble souls, He calls us to Him as the Lamb of God, very gentleness itself.

§ VII. Earthly monarchs do not treat their subjects as slaves ; they are content to draw their revenue and command service at need, and leave men otherwise at liberty. But, on the contrary, the only thing Jesus requires of His subjects is the sacrifice of their liberty. He means us to be His slaves, and by no other way can we attain to the Kingdom of Heaven. Nor is this any strange tidings to those who have experience in His ways ; all such know well how, when He takes possession of a soul, He brings it into a blessed captivity ; how His Love "constraineth" it. Heart, will, intellect, all become

subject to Him. We read in the Book of Genesis, that Pharaoh gave so great power to Joseph in the land of Egypt, that "without him no man should lift up his hand or foot" (xli. 44); and this is a type of the rule which Jesus exercises over us. The expression is figurative as to the antitype, but it is no figure with respect to our Dear Lord. In truth, we should strive to be so subject to His rule as to think no thought, and move no limb, save to His Glory and under His Guidance.

§ VIII. There are rebels in this kingdom. Our Heavenly King takes possession of His Kingdom by the power of Grace and in Holy Communion; but too often men drive Him thence, breaking His gracious chains, and falling into the false liberty of sin. David was driven forth with contumely from Jerusalem by his people; but we drive our King Jesus from out our hearts with yet greater insults, because we cannot bear to be captives to His Will, and even as an exiled king might hover round his frontiers, seeking to win back his people, so does Jesus watch over us, till the softening Grace of His Holy Spirit make us ready to admit Him once more to that which is His Own.

§ IX. Alas, for the contumely wherewith He is treated by His own servants! Not even the Jews, when they crowned Him with thorns, mocked Him so cruelly as Christians too often do; acknowledging Him with their lips as their King, and yet setting Him at naught in their

deeds. Nevertheless He chose to be a Monarch despised rather than a King of Glory when on earth. It was but once during His earthly sojourn that He appeared in glory, on Mount Tabor, but He accepted His lowliness as the Outcast of the people, day by day. It is in this garb that He seeks to reign in the hearts of His true servants.

There is yet one insult man can offer his King when he has rejected Him, and that is to enthrone the world, the flesh, and the devil—vanity, sensuality, in His place. These, alas ! are too often the powers to which we give our real allegiance. Be it ours to give ourselves up to Him in voluntary subjection, and so to learn that where He rules, and there only, is “the perfect law of liberty.”

X

*It specially behoves those who are dedicated to God's service
to obey the precepts of Jesus Christ.*

§ 1. **W**HAT is it to live according to the Mind of Jesus Christ? Three things are necessary to this: 1st. To follow His maxims; 2nd, to do His work; and 3rd, to be actuated in all we do by His Spirit.

Now, the first of these truths is applicable to all who aim at a godly life, whether in the world or apart from it

But it is grievous to see how frequently our Dear Lord's precepts are set aside, even by those who profess a high standard. Let us consider this more closely. He bids His followers count it blessed to be deprived of earthly joys and comforts (Luke vi.). Yet do not His followers, for the most part, seek to obtain as much of both as they can, provided only they abstain from what is actually sinful? He says, "Blessed are they that mourn," but most of His servants shun what they count as dismal and unsociable.

Christ bids us not let our right hand know what the left hand doth ; but men much more frequently use whatever they consider reasonable ways of vaunting and exalting themselves, even in what concerns religious matters, and there is nothing, as a rule, which we avoid more than to be neglected or lightly esteemed by others.

Christ bids us be silent under reproach, and He Himself set us the most marvellous example in this respect ; but how rare it is to find anyone whose first impulse under blame is not to justify themselves eagerly.

Christ bids us keep under our body, but most men take more pains to study bodily ease and comfort than aught else. He bids us to be simple as a little child in word and deed, but in the world men mock at simplicity and straightforwardness, and wish to be esteemed politic and clever.

Finally, He tells His followers not to "love the world,

or the things of the world ;" not to seek it, save where the good of souls is concerned ; but how many we find who, while professing to follow Christ, are of a distracted, dissipated mind. Is this not too true, and that more especially of those who profess to have taken up His Cross, meaning to follow Him ?

§ 11. Christ has called you to the "vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. iv. 1), in accordance with His eternal design for your salvation, and has set you apart in order that you might not tread the broad way on which the world runs. He has called you to seek the counsels of perfection, to obey His gracious precepts, which may be summed up under three heads—love of mortification, love of abjection, and love of persecution. But the worldly spirit rejects all such precepts as unreasonable and intolerable, mere folly and extravagance. Surely then, the rather it behoves you, Christ's chosen servants, to fulfil them, and to point the way by your example, to those who have not as yet been led to seek so special a dedication ; your calling and vocation can demand no less. You are in a position of responsibility, you have to guide the souls of others to the right path ; how can you do this unless the precepts of Christ are your own one unfailling rule ? What will your words of instruction and warning avail if you evidently shrink from all humiliation and mortification, if you look complacently or with approbation upon worldly pomps and vanities, and fall in

with secular ways and opinions, either out of policy or because you really cleave to them?

Entrusted as you are with the guidance of souls, you are bound to strive to lead those committed to you by God, in accordance with the maxims of the cross, not with the easy-going, indulgent maxims of the world, which are the ruin of all true holiness, a mockery of our Crucified Lord, and a scandal to faithful minds.

§ III. You are the witnesses of Christ upon earth. During His Earthly Ministry, He was our Surety, our Witness to His Father, and now He entrusts the office to you of being His witness; He calls upon you to bear witness to Him, not in word only, but in your whole life, in mortification and persecution, as in peace and gladness. He would not have you "moved by these afflictions, for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto," and "the trying of your faith worketh patience." Beware lest you bring discredit on His Name by avoiding the responsibilities which it entails.

It is a great privilege to be chosen by Christ to be His disciple; but He Himself has said that whosoever receives that privilege, must await suffering and humiliation. You must do one thing or the other, you must accept His precepts or renounce them; which shall it be? This is no mere question of theory; it is altogether a practical matter. "Whoever doth not bear His cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple." Live with Him

and to Him, and let your life, in its purity and devotion, be a standing witness against the false principles and precepts of the world.

§ IV. The world denounces Christ's maxims as impracticable, unnatural ; but you, His sworn soldiers, are pledged to maintain and practise them, or you would be traitors to your flag. Nor are these maxims any mere theory ; Jesus preached them, says S. Augustine, from the Cross as His pulpit, He proved them through His whole Life. And if the Master willingly accepted humiliation and suffering, is it not fitting that His servants should do the like ?

Nevertheless, human nature shrinks from such maxims, and it therefore behoves the ministers of Christ to prove their belief in the doctrine they teach by their practice ; to show that "wisdom is justified of His children," and that there may be peace, happiness, and rejoicing, in a life of poverty, suffering, and humiliation. Strive to be like S. Paul, if need be, "an ambassador in bonds."

Must we not honestly confess that too often worldly men are more faithful to the maxims of the world than Christ's servants to those of their Master ? Look at one of our great capitals, or at our courts, see how painfully men strive to conform with everything which fashion or etiquette exacts, what sacrifices they are ready to make in order to comply with worldly customs and opinions. Do those who profess to lead a devout life take the like

pains to observe the maxims of the Cross of Christ? Is it not a just cause for shame that we should allow worldly people to be bolder and more earnest in following their profession than we, the servants of Christ, are in following Him? The world's rules are imperative, and men bow before them; but we do not scruple to try and accommodate those of the Gospel to our own whims and wishes, and to that very world itself which Jesus has said hates Him, and is at enmity with Him. And yet those who are acting thus, have sworn to be faithful to His banner at their baptism.

On all sides we find nominal Christians, for it has become the use among civilized nations to profess Christianity; but, among those who call themselves by His Holy Name, how many follow His precepts, how many acknowledge their authority, alas! how many plainly reject and despise them?

§ v. Consider how these things really are. Do we not continually hear that which Jesus has condemned, spoken of with approval and satisfaction? Do not religiously disposed persons talk as if worldly success, worldly greatness and splendour, worldly talents, were the most desirable of attainments? Is not this apparent in their general conversation and expressions? But is it consistent with a true love for our Despised, Suffering Master?

When men hear of a friend's disaster, it may be some

and to Him, and let your life, in its purity and devotion, be a standing witness against the false principles and concepts of the world.

§ IV. The world denounces Christ's maxims as impracticable, unnatural; but you, His sworn soldiers, pledged to maintain and practise them, or you are traitors to your flag. Nor are these maxims mere theory; Jesus preached them, says S. Augustine, on the Cross as His pulpit, He proved them throughout His whole Life. And if the Master willingly accepted pain and suffering, is it not fitting that His followers should do the like?

Nevertheless, human nature shrinks from pain, and it therefore behoves the ministers of Christ to show their belief in the doctrine they teach by their lives. To show that "wisdom is justified of Her children," that there may be peace, happiness, and contentment in a life of poverty, suffering, and humiliation, like S. Paul, if need be, "an ambassador in bonds."

Must we not honestly confess that the world is more faithful to the maxims of the world than Christ's servants to those of Christ? Do those of our great capitals, or all our great cities, men strive to conform to the maxims of the world, to etiquette, expediency, and self-interest, in order to succeed in the world? Do those who are

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our with the common penitents that they are in meditation, in company, feel incapable, stupid, and that they waste the exercises unprofitably, and the course it is both harassing and the cause is plain: men are lazy; they will not seek the aid of Him Who is ever ready to give Himself wholly to them as they complain of this incapacity,—they rightly, learn to use His strength to justify your weakness.

to pray or meditate, when you are in thought, when all seems hollow, within you, then is the time for Christ's teaching, and to "put on the armor" is this so deep a mystery as to spiritual persons, it concerns all who

reverse, the loss of fortune, some unexpected humiliation which has overtaken him, do they ever, for one moment look upon him as receiving a favour from God's Hand? Do they consider such tribulation as a blessing? Do not the pious men look upon such occurrences as subjects of pity and condolence? Whence does this spring, from our wholly mistaken appreciation of the relative value of the lofty things of this world, and the lowliness of our Lord and Master, and of His precepts? Yet it seems for a Christian, a religious man, to prize worldly ease so highly, to follow worldly maxims, to shun the shame of the Cross of Christ?

If you would fulfil your obligation as His servant with a hearty spirit, you must die continually to the things of sense, to the inclinations of your worldly mind. He who is consecrated to God as His priest and minister has pledged himself to die daily, to renounce the world and the flesh, to be, as was his Master, a ready victim for the cause of God, accepting shame and contumely cheerfully, if need be.

Surely it is a kind of mockery to profess to love Jesus and then refuse to follow His precepts? Of such things that He will say, "These are the wounds with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zech. xiii. 6).

XI

*We must put on the Lord Jesus Christ in all circumstances
and all difficulties.*

§ 1. EVERY director is familiar with the common complaint from his penitents that they are utterly powerless and lifeless in meditation, in communion, in retreat; that they feel incapable, stupid, barren of all good thoughts, and that they waste the time allotted to their spiritual exercises unprofitably, and to their own discomfort. Of course it is both harassing and unprofitable so to do, but the cause is plain: men do not employ the right remedy; they will not seek the True Physician, or ask healing of Him Who is ever ready to help them, Who has given Himself wholly to them as their very own. You who complain of this incapacity,—learn to use your own powers rightly, learn to use His Help rightly, so as to sanctify your weakness.

When you feel unable to pray or meditate, when you cannot frame one holy thought, when all seems hollow, numb, wearily helpless within you, then is the time for you to remember S. Paul's teaching, and to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Nor is this so deep a mystery as to concern only very spiritual persons, it concerns all who would live a godly life.

But here it is needful to observe, that to imitate Christ, and to "put on" Christ, is not one and the same thing. We imitate our Blessed Lord when we try to do the like actions with Him, and when, by our own operation, we produce a resemblance or expression of His actions in ourselves, either inwardly or outwardly. But, to "put on the Lord Jesus," is to appropriate and apply His actions, so that, as S. Paul says, it is no longer you that act, but Christ dwelling in you.

For instance, you would fain offer the best love of your heart to God, but you know not what to say. Then offer to Him the boundless Love of His Blessed Son when on earth, and still present on the Altars. You seek to prostrate yourself before His Infinite Majesty ;—offer up the unfathomable humiliations of Jesus in His Passion. You want to have your mind filled with deep recollection and adoration, but earthly follies and trivial worries render you helpless ; then offer up the wondrous Obedience and Unutterable Worship rendered by the Son of God in His Manhood to His Father. Take possession, so to say, of His actions, and offer them to God together with your own powerlessness and incapacity, so as to forget yourself wholly, and to be conscious of two things only—the Divine actions of Jesus which you offer, and the Presence of His Father to Whom you offer them. This it is "to be clothed so that we shall not be found naked" (2 Cor. v. 3).

That which we put on is visible, and conceals the body which it clothes ; even so our frail heart is covered by that which we put on, Christ Jesus, and it is Him and His actions which meet the Father's Eye to Whom we make our offering. In the same sense, S. Paul says, that "our life is hid with Christ in God ;" hid beneath the gracious works of our Dear Lord, buried with Him to live in and through Him.

We may reverently liken this putting on of the Lord Jesus to the manner in which His Own Humanity was clothed with the Lord from Heaven, offering that Manhood to His Father.

§ II. Sometimes Jesus Himself clothes a soul with His Own Grace and actions, while that soul remains almost passive in His Hands, as a mother clothes her child, which does no more than let her work her will. A soul thus dealt with is clothed, filled with Christ, and can see naught save Him.

But more frequently the soul is called itself to put on the deeds of Christ, above all in times of dryness and hesitation, of helplessness and darkness, when it seems vain to strive after any good thought or aspiration. Then it is that you must go to Jesus, and taking from Him that which you have not of your own, offer of His abundance to His Father instead of your own emptiness ; offer His Love, His Lowliness, His Grace, His Patience in the place of all that is lacking in you.

Otherwise you will abide in your coldness and weary depression.

Nor is it only in such seasons of dryness that you should "put on Christ." It should be your habit in every prayer, whenever you come before the Presence of God, your ordinary familiar way of life; for Jesus is yours, your very own, your inheritance. You have the right to offer His Blood to His Father, His Sufferings, His Merits; to offer them as your own; and in like manner you have a right to offer His Love, His Adoration, His Humility, His Patience, as the fruits of the Vine whereof you are a branch. You cannot suffer as He suffered, but you can strive to act as He acted, and thereby to become more and more meet to "put on" His Divine Life.

Again, reflect that you owe a debt to God's Justice, and that you have two means of payment in your hands;—your own deeds and those of Jesus, wherewith you are clothed. Whether of the two will be most effectual to discharge your debt? And is it not fitting to offer the best you can to God, the Merits of Christ rather than your demerits?

The soul which realizes its own unworthiness will scarcely dare to offer aught that is of itself to God. Our own conscience tells us that we are sin-stained, full of self-love, and that we can offer nothing worthy of God's acceptance, save through Christ; and so we gladly take

refuge in His Bosom, and offering His Gracious Manhood to the Father, we lose sight of self, and come boldly before God's Majesty in the Strength of Him Whom we have put on.

§ III. What can be more elevating, more sublime, than such a putting on of Christ? The soul is stripped of self and all the weakness of self to be clothed with His Glory; it is certain to be graciously accepted of the Father, Who looks lovingly on His Son's garment, even as in type Jacob looked upon that of Joseph:—"It is my son's garment." His Grace and Glory cling to those who wear it, its sacred odour surrounds them: "The smell of His raiment is as a field which the Lord hath blessed." (Gen. xxxvii. 27.)

The Church alludes to this "filling up," when in combination with His One Great Sacrifice of the Altar it teaches us to unite our praises "with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of Heaven," before the Ever-blessed Trinity.

Be sure then, that there are none so wretched and guilty but that they may seek thus to rise to God:—there are none so cold and material but that they may be spiritualized thus; none so barren and dry but that they may offer an acceptable service to God through the Infinite Merits of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

XII

The Christian's every Action must be kindled with the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

§ 1. **T**HE one aim of Christianity, as of its Founder, is to kindle us with His Spirit, and to teach us to live solely thereby. Not the holiest actions wrought for our own or our neighbours' good ; neither zeal, charity nor penitence are our ultimate object, but to be partakers of His Divine Life. With that we are God-like ;—without it we are but as lifeless corpses. This is “the bond of perfectness” of which S. Paul speaks ; and therefore it is that he who abounds most in good works, in austerities, and whatever attracts the praise of men, were but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, if he be not filled with the Spirit of Jesus as his true life. And by this is meant something even beyond obeying Him, and “putting Him on.” This is done by conforming your actions to His, “by appropriating His Grace to yourself ; but there is a step more to be won, when His Holy Spirit so kindles your heart and all you do, that in S. Paul's words He is your life.

Consider how entirely the body depends upon the Spirit for life ; even so the soul's life depends upon the Spirit of Jesus. It is more profitable to cleave to Him

in peaceful simplicity than to distract ourselves with many thoughts, however admirable in themselves, for thus His Spirit inspires all we do, and breathing upon our most trifling actions, it rules and guides each and all.

Once more ;—the perfection of Christian life is to be filled with this Spirit of Christ. Beware of imagining that it is to be attained only by those whose piety is eminent—this is a mere evasion of those who shrink from following Him. It is incumbent on every Christian to seek it, and if you rejoin that there are but few who look thus upon the Life of Jesus Christ, and still fewer who follow it, we can but admit that while this is a melancholy truth, the obligation remains unchanged. Let us consider this obligation from the side of Christ and from your own side.

§ II. The obligation to live according to the Spirit of Christ, as viewed from His side.

Was not the Blood of Christ our Ransom? Are we not bought with a price? If we were not already Christ's by creation, we are His by redemption. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price;" S. Paul says (1 Cor. vi. 19). But His rights must be set forth in His control over our actions. It were but little to possess the tree, and have no power over the fruit. And the way in which He exercises this Divine right is by kindling and influencing our every action ;—our part being to

forward His Empire by cleaving stedfastly to Him, and uniting ourselves inwardly to Him everywhere and always.

Again, He has a right over all our actions, inasmuch as He is the Head over our body, which is the Church; and in Him "all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord." (Eph. ii. 21.) Thus His Spirit should be the source and motive power of each thought, action, and intention, however trifling; not self-love, self-indulgence, or any other earthly influence. Let Him guide them all, averting all that can pollute; for even those actions which are begun in a holy spirit, become corrupt if we lose hold of Him, and our own human motives mingle with our better impulses. If we are, as S. Paul tells us, "the Body of Christ, and members in particular (1 Cor. xii. 27), we ought to be so filled with His Spirit, that every word, every movement, be influenced by Him. We should walk as He walked, speak as He spoke, hope as He hoped, so that it be not we who live, but Christ that liveth in us. Blessed burden, thrice blessed bonds wherewith we are bound to Him!

§ III. "The Body of Christ and members in particular." If so, just as our body is dependent upon our soul, so must we be dependent upon the Spirit of Christ. The body is lifeless without the soul, which produces all its movements; and in like manner His *Grace* should kindle all our movements. The soul never

forsakes the body while it lives, and so we cannot live or move without being inspired by Jesus. No hindrances or checks can part body and soul without causing death, and so we must partake of His Life if we would live ourselves. Jesus enters into His servants by means of the Holy Eucharist, and we yield ourselves up to His unfailing Rights. What do we not owe to such Love! The Angels look on in wondering amazement that He should vouchsafe to become One with us, and make us one with Him. Surely no stronger, more absolute right over His creatures can be conceived!

§ IV. Our obligation to live according to the Spirit of Christ, as viewed from our own side.

Even had our Lord no right over our life and actions, self-interest would lead us to make ourselves His voluntary subjects, inasmuch as, unless what we do is done in union with Him, it must come to naught. The vine branch can bear no fruit except it be growing on the vine stock, whence it draws its vigour and life; and in like manner we must draw our spirit and life from Christ the Vine, if we hope to be fruitful branches. "I can do all things through Christ Which strengtheneth me." But without Him we can do nothing, and men fail miserably every day for lack of realizing this duty. Our earthly minds have no good thing dwelling in them (Rom. vii.), and there is "a law in our members," which wars against every heavenward tendency, and which can

only be resisted by union with the Mind of Christ ; by "being strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man." (Eph. iii. 16.)

§ v. The nearer anyone draws to God, the less he will do of himself. If you examine your own heart, you will see that when God has been most near to you in teaching or consolation, you have been most silent, most recollected, most tranquil inwardly and outwardly ; and this is because He absorbs and draws out that which is merely of this world in you, and infuses His Own Spirit of purity and truth instead. Our Blessed Lord when on earth said, "The Son can do nothing of Himself but what He seeth the Father do" (John v. 19) ; and surely it beseems us to own the like dependence on Him ; to do nothing of ourselves. The Divine Manhood did nothing save as inspired by the Godhead ; the members of Christ must do nothing without their Head. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." (1 Cor. ii. 14.) We can only learn God's Will through Jesus, our Life and our Rest, the Centre round Whom our whole being moves. We cannot come to God, or do that which is well-pleasing in His Sight, save through His Dear Son, dwelling in our hearts (Gal. iv. 6) ; but if He be indeed reigning there, we shall speak, think, and act as, with, and in Jesus. Blessed life ! and yet we need so much urging before we willingly adopt it !

Think of yourself as of a fabric about to be cast into

the dyer's vat, destined to come forth thoroughly penetrated with the colour therein, no thread left unchanged. Jesus shed His Precious Blood, not merely to redeem us, but also to win us, to steep us in His Own Glory, to bind us to Himself for ever, as His faithful servants. Who that loves the Lord but would be His subject? Yet it is only through the Grace of His Holy Spirit that our King can reign in our hearts; only by a daily, fervent, devout giving up of ourselves in will to be His slaves. Be it yours to seek ever more and more the blessed bondage of a recollected spirit.

§ VI. When God breathed the breath of life into Adam, we may observe three conditions of his existence. He was moulded by God's Own Hands; he was inanimate and motionless; his substance was clay. Ready moulded to receive life; of a plastic substance, passive and without movement save what God should impart. Even so we must be moulded by God's Hand, ready to be shaped, cut, to receive many a biting blow, many a painful change, to be lifted up and cast down until we attain the form He would have us bear. We must be pliable, plastic as clay, which can be manipulated as the potter wills. Pride, resistance, self-will, hardness, cannot receive His Holy Spirit. And we must be motionless, passive in His Hand, gathered together in meek and holy recollection, sitting at His Sacred Feet, asking only to have His "seal upon our heart" (Cant. viii. 6), so that we may truly say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

BOOK IV

On Progress in Holiness

I

Everyone who seeks to lead a holy life must be trained to meditation.

Excuses.

§ 1. **D**IRECTORS are accustomed to be met with difficulties and excuses concerning this point. We find many persons who are loth to be urged onwards in the habit of meditation. They plead that it appertains to those who have adopted the religious life, or to the more specially devout living in the world, but they say that for their own part they have no inclination, no capacity, for such a life of prayer. Or again, we are told by another that great intellectual capacity is needed to meditate well; that common minds have not power to do so; that he is not learned enough; that it would be presumption in him to pretend to deep meditation. A third tells us that meditation is an excellent thing for

ose who are drawn to it by the Holy Spirit ; but that has no drawing that way, and evidently it is not the Will of God that he should seek it. He has no head in contemplation, indeed he feels altogether averse to attempting it.

Now, all these are mere excuses. Unquestionably all are not alike called to the practice of meditation. God gives divers gifts, both of grace and nature, in different degrees to different people. No doubt those who have given themselves up to a religious life have an advantage over others in cultivating the habit of meditation. Solitude, a regular life, strict rule, and constant pious duties, tend greatly to promote an interior mind. In this measure we may apply the same observations to those who are leading a specially devout life in the world. It is likewise true that much study, a vivid imagination, or a naturally fertile mind, may make mental prayer easier to those who possess such advantages ; and it is probable that those persons who feel a strong attraction to it will succeed better than others. All such are favoured with special privileges, for which they may well be thankful ; but it by no means follows that they have an exclusive power of cultivating mental prayer, or that those who are less favoured may hold themselves excused ; on the contrary, the fact remains unchanged,—that everyone who would make progress in holiness must strive to make a habit of meditation and mental prayer.

§ II. Let us consider the real reasons for such excuses. Look closely into those alleged, and you will soon prove to your penitents that they are mere self-delusion.

You shrink from meditation. Well now, deal honestly with yourself; is it not because you put a limit upon the length you are willing to go in serving God? because you have set yourself certain rules and plans, intending to stop short in them as sufficient, without subjecting yourself to too constant or too urgent a strain? But will you venture thus to dictate to God as to your own perfection? These limits which you fix for yourself, are really limits which you strive to put to His Guidance; you are refusing to be led by Him whither He sees fit.

But let us look yet a little more closely within the secrets of your heart, and perhaps we shall find that your self-indulgent spirit recoils from the difficulties of meditation; for it is difficult, and requires a resolute control of the mental faculties, which is not the work of a day. You shrink from the toil and effort, and say that you are incapable of meditation. The truth is, that your present life is so easy, your devotional exercises so free from effort, that you cling to them, and seek to be excused what is harder; but it is better to be honest, and say fairly that you shun mental prayer because it is toilsome and difficult.

Or it may be that self-indulgence has developed itself in another form. You sought nothing save spiritual consolation and sweetness in meditation; and not finding

that, you turn away disappointed and weary. Do not plead incapacity; say at once that you are too self-indulgent to persevere in what yields you no sensible satisfaction.

Again, it may be that your impatience is in fault. Results do not come to pass as quickly as you wish, and you are disappointed. You began to practise mental prayer, expecting within a few weeks to become a great contemplative! you spared no preparation, and you expected to obtain the precious gift of prayer at will! Failing to do this, your impatience lost heart, forgetting that this gift of prayer is the reward of steadfast perseverance, and that it can only be won by a holy determination.

Do not deceive yourself by saying that you are incapable of meditation; it is not the true reason that you give up that pious practice. You have yet to learn that the very first seeds as well as the ripe growth of mental prayer are to be found amid interior crosses, and it requires a generous hearty spirit of self-denial to cultivate it amid these difficulties.

§ III. Again, the reasons for cultivating a habit of mental prayer are many. You have a heart to love, and if so you are capable of becoming a man of prayer. Draw near to God with that loving heart, and let it pour out to Him all that fills it. This is the best prayer possible. Prayer consists in a loving rest in God, Who takes delight in

hearing and answering the whisperings of His children's hearts. Look at it thus, and prayer is not difficult; let your heart flow out in holy familiarity to Him, pour out your mind with the simplicity you would use to a beloved and venerated friend. God is the Best of all friends.

Do not delude yourself with imagining that you need to produce beautiful or intellectual thoughts in your prayer; this is a mere ignorant error. Very often such things serve only as a hindrance instead of a help; the intellect hinders the heart, which is better fed by warmth and earnestness than by talent or brilliancy. Sometimes very learned people have less aptitude for mental prayer than more ignorant minds; because their reason takes too active a part, and interferes with that inward simplicity which is an absolute necessity for all converse with God. Your ignorance or want of imagination will in no way incapacitate you for prayer.

You were made expressly to live in perpetual intercourse with God—blessed necessity! Examine your own soul, and you will find that it can know no rest save in Him. All human intercourse ends in comparative disappointment and bitterness; it cannot fill or satisfy you. And that intercourse with God is neither more nor less than prayer, wherein He admits the soul to a loving familiarity.

The one thing God requires of you is your heart. Were you to give Him all you possess without that, He would

heed it not. "My son, give Me thy heart." Prayer alone conveys to Him this possession in its fulness. No one can live wholly deprived of joy and gladness; and it is above all else in prayer that true joy is found. While we say that trial, privation, and difficulties beset mental prayer, neither must we ignore that it is likewise the fountain whence all gladness flows; it is the presence-chamber of our Heavenly King, wherein He grants all favours and confers all gifts.

Our Dear Lord has bidden us to pray without ceasing; but He did not mean thereby that we were to make continual vocal prayer—that were wholly incompatible with the requirements of our earthly life. What He meant then, is the heart's prayer, and that is true meditation, real mental prayer.

§ iv. Why we need to use mental prayer. There are four main hindrances to a holy life, which can only be met by the diligent use of mental prayer. The first of these hindrances is want of self-knowledge, which overshadows and darkens the soul; whereas a clear perception of one's own condition and weakness is absolutely necessary to spiritual progress. But this can only be attained by the help of prayer, which, so to say, holds up a mirror to the soul, wherein are reflected all the movements of nature and grace; by which the "discerning of spirits" is acquired, by which we learn to tread in the sure ways of life. Without it you can never detect the weak places

in your spiritual state, or distinguish between truth and falsehood, but rather you will fall over unperceived moral precipices. The next hindrance lies in the passions, strong and lively as they are in most men. He who would master them, and be a fitting temple for the Holy Spirit of God, must do so by the help of prayer. Nothing so calms and subdues the passions. We all know how easily a man acquires a certain similarity to those with whom he is intimate; how much more true is this of intercourse with God, Who stamps the impress of His Spirit on those who seek His loving converse in prayer. The third hindrance to a holy life is estrangement from God. S. Gregory says that there is naught so near to the heart of man as his God, and yet that heart is for ever straying on one side or another from His Blessed Presence. Who does not know how hard it is to maintain a constant sense of that Presence? And what can tend so powerfully to its maintenance as prayer?

The fourth hindrance lies in the senses, which are continually dragging a man down to a purely animal life; and without prayer the descent is inevitable. Nothing save recollection and prayer can avert the impressions perpetually received from external things, and spiritualize a man's daily course amid the distractions and temptations which beset him.

II

How to use mental prayer profitably.

§ I. **D**O not be startled to find how few people really succeed in prayer. This does not apply to such persons as are leading a life incompatible with a real spirit of prayer, or of those obviously incapable of recollection and self-control—no one marvels at their failure. But there are others who seem of an altogether different stamp, but who nevertheless do not succeed in praying well. But those who are skilled in the guidance of souls, will not fail to perceive that the cause of this lies in the imperfect aim and intention with which such persons engage in prayer. Self-seeking in one way or another is the cause of this. One class of minds seeks intellectual light and perception ; another spiritual luxury and self-indulgence ; a third imagines that contemplation and rest in God are to be found in a sort of bodily and mental torpor, which they call “quietude.” Let us examine the mental conditions which render prayer unprofitable.

Weariness, dryness, and desolation have been discussed in numberless spiritual books, and still many a weak soul turns away disheartened and dejected because of them. Perhaps you had boasted of your readiness to

suffer at God's Hand, and yet so soon as It is laid upon you, you cry out with Job, "Have pity upon me, O my friends!" Where are your vaunted patience and fortitude?

Yet there is as much or more danger in the season of sweetness and consolation; these very blessings sometimes render prayer unprofitable, and that because it is no easy thing to receive God's gifts with a pure spirit. All pious souls have a certain predisposition to accept suffering in a right spirit, but a man had need be a saint to use the sweetness with which God sometimes floods His creatures rightly. Such as we are for the most part, we bring so much of self into the matter, that we often drive God away in His very pity for our souls.

A third class of minds experience neither great desolation nor great consolation, and these are apt to fall into a languid spiritless condition, in which they refuse to bring any voluntary efforts to bear on their religious exercises, accepting God's gifts as a right rather than as a grace.

§ II. There is but one remedy for all this, namely, to enter upon prayer in a spirit of self-sacrifice. Go to pray as though you were ascending Mount Calvary; think of prayer as of an altar whereon you are to die. Jesus is sacrificed daily, not crowned upon our altars. Do not expect light and consolation, aim solely at being a willing offering to God; go to pray in the same spirit with which the martyrs went to meet death; approach as unto

furnace wherein your imperfections will be purged, rather than as unto a bed of roses and delights, and then be sure that nothing will hinder your union with God.

Unite your prayer with that of Jesus in Gethsemane, and all its trials will be light. It may be in silence, in contrition, in desolation, that your Lord tries you, but submit yourself a willing victim to whatever it be. Bethink you of the pains of hell, and all healing pain will seem light, even though protracted and sharp. It may be that God chastens you by silence, or by permitting contrition to assume a form of bitter shame for past sin—whatever shape His loving correction may take, accept it in a spirit of ready sacrifice. Such a spirit will draw you very close to God in prayer. He will seem to say to you, “Thou hast faithlessly forsaken Me, and now I might forsake thee,” and you in all lowliness will cry out, “O Lord correct me, but with judgment!” And so, not unfrequently, the bitter waters will become sweet to your soul, and your darkness will become light.

If, on the other hand, God vouchsafes to pour out His consolations upon your soul in prayer, the spirit of self-sacrifice will prevent any danger of over-exaltation, and you will be more ready to feel humbled by His unmerited Grace than elated by it. Or if you are without any special consolation or trial, the spirit of willing self-oblation will preserve you from languid indifference or carelessness, and will keep you watchful and diligent in waiting upon

God. Teach those under your direction, then, to consider what is the final object of their prayer. Is it not union with God? And then go on to show them that this may be obtained under whatever aspect God wills that the soul should perceive His Presence. If they are really in earnest they will not persist in seeking only that which is acceptable to their own feelings; teach them to find union with God in dryness or sweetness, privation or abundance alike, as all tending to draw the soul heavenwards when satisfied by His Grace and man's submission. The Holy Spirit has told us that God will cast down the proud in his strength, and lay bare the depth of his misery and weakness, in order to lift him up purified and restored. Teach your penitents to win His favour by their own lowliness and self-abnegation; teach them to use their very hindrances and weaknesses "till the pools be filled with water." Teach them to "go softly" in penitence for past sin, to gather themselves together in stedfast recollection, to give themselves to God's service as volunteers to go forth to serve their country, without looking for any reward save the fulfilment of that service. If you can teach them this, you will, indeed, have fulfilled one main point of your charge, in teaching them to pray.

III

Everyone should follow his special attraction in mental prayer.

§ 1. **T**HIS attraction is neither more nor less than the Finger of God leading men's souls inwardly. And it is most important that you should teach those under your guidance to use this attraction rightly—the rather that, for want of instruction, or by misuse of books and spiritual methods, many fail to do so.

First of all then, those who are in the ordinary stages of mental prayer, should be cautioned to use due preparation. Holy Scripture tells us that those who pray without this, tempt God (Eccles. xviii. 23), and surely it beseems us to do all that lies in our power to make ourselves ready to receive His Grace ; to invite the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts. It is mere presumption to neglect this, and fancy that we are leaving all to God, as though we need not make any exertion for ourselves. Such bold carelessness deserves punishment, but those who give way to it are, nevertheless, apt to be discouraged because their prayer proves unfruitful and wearisome. Moreover, a presumptuous spirit will assuredly be beset with illusions ; an unprepared heart is open to be deceived, to flatter itself with the imagination that God has given a gift

of contemplation where there is really only vacuity, or by mistaking its own crude fancies for heavenly inspirations. There is no rest for such minds as these—they do but lose time—and he will spend but an unprofitable day who has wasted and lost his appointed time of prayer.

§ II. There is another class of persons who have entered what is called the passive state of prayer, and these too, must be taught to make fitting preparation. It does not follow that such persons are fitly prepared because they possess a certain interior recollection. Teach these persons to remember the respect and veneration due to the Great God, with Whom they are about to commune. What would they think of a courtier who, having asked audience of his sovereign, were to present himself without considering what he had to say? But there is a far greater irreverence in approaching God without any preparation. Nor is it well to admit the excuse that God will supply all that is needed. God's Goodness is no reason why His servants should be careless. Our duty is to do all that lies in our power to meet Him, and then to give ourselves up to His Holy Will. Without some such preparation it were easy to become presumptuous, and to fancy that we have a right to God's favours, and that they cannot fail us. Preparation is an acknowledgment that such favours are not due to us, and thereby we shall receive them more profitably.

§ III. Those who are inwardly drawn by a special

attraction to prayer, need not make a formal preparation. In fact, it is already made by the Holy Spirit Himself, and of a truth He prepares the heart to commune with its God far otherwise than man can do. Human preparation is at best most imperfect, but where He vouchsafes to breathe upon the soul, preparation and prayer become one and the same thing. Therefore let those who feel His Gracious drawing, give themselves up unresistingly to it, and put all their wonted systems of methodical preparation aside.

Some persons have asked what they are to do when praying thus? The answer would be, do nothing more than you do when not praying—that is to say, give yourself up to a simple quiet pursuit of the special attraction sent you, whether praying or going about your daily duties. It may be felt more powerfully in the time of prayer, when earthly cares are less urgent. But anyhow, be passive in God's Hands, and let Him lead you whither He will.

§ iv. Those who are distracted with an infinity of earthly cares and occupations, need to prepare themselves with marked effort for prayer; to enter within the sanctuary of their own hearts and God's Presence, from which they have been wandering. Prayer brings such souls back to fervent recollection, and renews the waste they have made of spiritual strength. But when a soul is led by some special attraction of the Holy Spirit, every-

thing is influenced thereby, and there is no chasm to bridge over between its daily work and its prayer. That soul will continually dwell upon the subject to which God is leading it, and every duty will be better done, because of that pre-occupying grace.

If then, you are specially led to self-abasement before the Majesty of God, or to contrition for past sin, do not turn your thoughts away from that subject ; if your whole soul is filled with confusion, accept it ; if the terror of God's Judgment is ever present to you, do not seek to escape from the solemn awe. Give yourself up to His Guiding Hand. Imitate the boatman who lays aside his oars when a serviceable wind fills his sails, and be sure He Who breathed upon creation and gave it shape, will guide you safely to the haven where you would be.

IV

General resolutions are a snare to many.

§ 1. **W**HY is it that so many resolutions are daily made concerning self-mastery and sanctification, which nevertheless, are as fleeting as the sighs which often accompany them? Why do we see so little result come of what, at the time, seemed most fervent resolutions?

Good intentions, earnestly formed, vehemently affirmed,

generously offered, formed, it may be, before the Altar, even while actually communicating, and yet they prove ineffectual ; and their breach leaves the soul filled with a sense of shame and faithlessness.

Of course many reasons will be given for this : human frailty, our lack of stedfastness, and the like ; but the true cause is, that so many persons only make GENERAL resolutions to conquer themselves, and seek more diligently to lead a holy life. This be sure, is the source of endless failures. People rest satisfied with their fervour and their sighs after general perfection, and imagine themselves to be doing some great thing, whereas nothing can be more delusive and dangerous. Be sure that there can be no real progress where a man stops short in general resolutions, instead of setting himself vigorously to work upon some individual fault to be conquered, or grace to be won.

§ II. Now why are we so ready thus to stop short in general good resolutions? Our natural inclination shrinks from what is hard and painful, but so long as the hardness and painfulness are general and abstract, there is not much to alarm it. Goodness looks easy and attractive enough at a distance, and when all the sharp outlines of particular definite action are rounded into a vague haziness. Nature is ready enough to accept an easy-going, pleasant sort of goodness ; to sigh sentimentally after the highest, most lofty graces ; to set her face

towards the most exalted perfection, so long as all this need only be general. Talk about mortification, death to self-love, solitude, lowliness, or the like, and so long as you do not propose to enforce them by any definite act, your natural heart will make no difficulty, for the good reason that all this is no hardship, and you may easily be deluded into supposing that all is right. The mind grows accustomed to vigorous intentions, promises, and protestations which end in nothing, and it feels no real alarm at all such general threats of strictness, knowing that they never take any real shape so as to become inconvenient.

There is a still further danger, namely, that you may be so satisfied with making good resolutions which you do not carry out, as at last to look upon them as a storehouse of gifts and graces in which you may safely trust.

For instance, a person feels a great desire after holiness, after the highest degrees of self-devotion and perfection. He is filled with a pleasant glow of virtue, and believing himself capable of living and dying for God, he makes many vehement resolutions as in God's Sight. Then he dwells complacently upon these, as though the desired end were already attained. Surely herein "the children of the world are wiser than the children of light," for, if worldly men aim at riches and fame, they are by no means content with great aspirations, but they

take every conceivable active measure to attain their end. What man of the world is satisfied with a vehement desire for wealth, and does not set about acquiring it?

§ III. Doubtless a rightly directed will is always good, and therefore, if you form an intention to give yourself to God, it is a step gained towards a good end ; but you must not stop short in a vague general intention, or practically you may be sure that you do not really long for that which you affirm to be your object. When therefore you are feeling fervent and earnest, do not be content with saying, "I resolve to love God, to be patient, to be good-tempered." Everybody can do that much, even the most careless and imperfect have seasons in which they wish to be better. Rather do you say, "I will be humble in such a special domestic trial which continually arises, and which wounds my pride. I will practise mortification in this particular act of self-indulgence, or sensuality, or passion, to which I have hitherto yielded. I will be patient and self-controlled under such and such a provocation which often meets me. I will be kindly and gentle with such a person who habitually irritates and worries me."

Such resolutions as these are solid and practical. Unless they touch individual acts, be sure they are useless. All virtue is technically classed as habitual or actual, but mere general resolutions lead to neither.

§ IV. If, in those souls who are under your direction,

you find that great excitement, tender susceptibility, vivid impressions, strong perceptions, and the like, stop short of definite action, mistrust such emotions. When God works within the soul, it is always to promote its holiness ; and such lights and graces, if real, leave him who experiences them, more ready to endure, more humble in heart. But Satan knows how to imitate such graces, which may be known to be unreal when they produce no self-abasement or renunciation.

Those who have had much experience in the guidance of souls, are well aware that some are to be found who need not to be continually dwelling on the practice of definite good resolutions. But these are few indeed ; for they are those who, by a long habit of dying to self, have been so transformed into their God, that their whole life may not unfitly be called one good resolution. But you must not expect that many such will come into your hands ; therefore, be firm in inculcating the necessity of giving definite shape, to good resolutions, by all those who are fervent in prayer and general intention. Study the reasons why so many are faithless to their most well-meant and solemn resolutions.

These are often formed under excitement, when the difficulty attending them is unperceived, and when present sweetness throws a haze over actual obstacles. Then an unforeseen occasion arises ;—there is more difficulty than the person in question had foreseen, he takes

alarm, his fervour has passed away, and his fall will be great in proportion to the vanity with which he thought he stood upright. "Be sober, be vigilant," S. Peter says.

§ v. It is most necessary to look forward to special occasions, in forming good resolutions, otherwise there will be little real progress. Self-love is most deceptive. A man makes firm resolutions to be humble, mortified or obedient, but without contemplating any particular instances in which these resolutions are to be exercised. Then he meets with some annoyance or injury, some aggravating words or insult. Surely this is the occasion to fulfil his oft-made resolution of humility! He will grant the general fact, but he pleads that it will never do to give way in this matter, or allow himself to be so disrespectfully treated; indeed, common justice requires the truth to be asserted;—there is such a thing as false humility, and the like.

Or again, some opportunity for self-denial arises. Well, you resolved so fervently, a short time ago, to be so strictly self-denying;—now is your time. "Very true," you reply; "but, in this particular instance, good sense requires me to adapt myself to those with whom I am thrown. After all, some innocent enjoyment is lawful. I know that I did resolve to practise a universal self-denial, but sometimes one makes inconsiderate resolutions which need adaptation when individual cases arise."

Perhaps you resolved to win a more obedient spirit ; and now, when your will clashes with that of a Superior, you cannot bear to yield. But this is the opportunity for submission ? “ Yes, but then the order we obey should be reasonable,” you argue ; “ and I feel that I am right in this particular instance. My director is misinformed as to the circumstances ; he will not listen to what I have to say ; I am certain that I see the matter in its true light. Indeed, I think he is somewhat influenced by his own temper.”

Alas ! what a strange result of all those fine resolutions, so fervently uttered as they were. But it will always be the case more or less where people content themselves with making general and not special resolutions. And so it is that many a life is spent in mere good intentions and communions ; meditations and retreats are barren of results, because men and women stop short in excited feeling and glowing unpractical resolutions, which, having no definite object, end as they began, indefinitely and without fruit.

There are two rules which you may safely make for yourself or for those under your direction :—

I. When the heart is glowing with a spirit of self-devotion and love towards God, let it dwell upon the special, individual opportunities likely to arise of a practical nature.

II. When occasions for self-denial arise, accept them

frankly and heartily, if you have resolved to practise mortification, otherwise you are certain to give way, and the result will be a demoralized will.

V

Good resolutions will not last unless the soul prepares itself to encounter temptation.

§ 1. **T**HE truth of this assertion is sufficiently familiar to all who have to deal with retreats, missions, and other spiritual exercises. It is during such seasons that for the most part men are stimulated to earnest, generous desires after perfection, with which they return to the ordinary world all aglow, but which unhappily, are too often chilled before bearing any fruit. It behoves us to investigate the source of this imperfection, with a view to remedying it, lest we do despite to the Spirit of Grace. And unquestionably a want of due preparation for future temptation, together with our good resolutions, is the real cause of their frequent failure.

While you are experiencing the happiness of God's more conscious nearness in the season of a retreat, your conscience is calmed, your passions are hushed, and you are shielded from external interruptions; you make careful and holy resolutions, but most likely you do not foresee the trials and temptations which will surely

succeed the spiritual enjoyment now granted to you. The special season when you stood, so to say, before the Burning Bush of God's Own Presence, over, you will encounter various trials. God will prove you through desolation. All that was so bright and sweet will become dark and bitter ; the passions which you fondly believed extinguished for ever, will reassert their influence with fresh vigour and importunity ; it may be that some of the very people you care for most, will try you in a succession of harassing ways. All this should be foreseen, and you should make ready to meet the temptation stedfastly before it touches you, if you would resist to good purpose.

§ II. Why the good resolutions made in retreat are thus followed by temptation.

Consider why God bestowed those graces and favours upon you, which so gladdened your soul in retreat. You had wandered aside, you had let yourself be drawn to the creature rather than to the Creator, your heart was accessible to other loves rather than to that of God. Then, when you were brought face to face with Him in a holy silence, He caused you to feel the exquisite sweetness of His Grace, in order to win you to Himself, and you were won. But meanwhile your heart was not altogether cleansed, nor His Justice satisfied, and with a healing discipline, less pleasant, but not less loving, He deprives you of that sweetness. Strive to cherish the chastisement as well as the indulgence,—certain that both are Love.

So, again, it is but just that your passions should trouble you. God stilled them during your retreat in order that you might drink in spiritual strength, even as the ocean lies calm awhile, and ships sail peacefully to and fro. But the stormy season will return, and so will the tempest of passion rise up again in your heart. Once you gave way to these passions, your chief delight was in the excitement which they raised ; now you must bear their turbulence with patience and humility, and so they will set forward your sanctification, whereas before they were leading you to destruction.

During the season of retreat you were sheltered from the annoyances which your fellow-creatures entail on you. You were hidden from the world's worries. But bear in mind that in past times you have voluntarily made yourself a slave to the world and to human respect, and do not marvel that now the things you once prized are used to scourge you.

It is in love that God gives you peace and sweetness in retreat ; it is in love that He permits that sweetness, when it has done its work, to be withdrawn, lest it become rather a hindrance. It is in love that He permits the strife of inward passion, to warn you that while you live you must mistrust self, and keep a strict watch over your heart.

During the retreat, apart from external things, you made such ardent resolutions, you gave yourself so

heartily henceforward to God. Who but would do so when his heart is dilated by the sense of an unwonted nearness to God, by a supernatural overflow of grace ! Even a careless person might do as much, but the excitement once over, such an one would forget all his resolutions and fall away. You must be proved, lest you have no more solid foundations. It is all very well to believe in your stedfastness while untried and untempted ; the real test is when the passions and desires which you thought done with break out anew. Then is the time to meet their assaults calmly and bravely, and this is the real test of your resolutions.

God has made change and fluctuation the law of all things short of Heaven. Seasons come and go, the sky clouds and clears, our body and mind are in a state of perpetual alteration. Do not expect anything else in your soul's life. After the rest and lights of a retreat, darkness and weariness must needs come. God's dealings with souls are continually varying too. Fresh temptations must arise, though you thought yourself so safe ; it is a life-long labour to subdue them, and no one will ever subdue his passions who does not meet their renewed onslaughts without discouragement.

§ III. The counsels to be given under these circumstances may be reduced into small compass. God's Holy Spirit has bidden you endure temptation, and has promised that after He has tried you, ye shall come forth as

gold. Draw more closely within to God when you are pressed without, and He will draw closer to you. When all seems hard and strange, cleave to Him as a little child clings to its mother's breast to hide from what frightens it. Your part is to hold fast to Him with all possible trust and simplicity.

Strive to find rest in a gentle, loving, patient waiting till such time as sunshine shall return. You may wait confidently, for it never fails to return to the soul which awaits it. But you must wait peacefully and hopefully, without that restless anxiety which, while it perturbs the conscience, serves also to confuse it. Such restlessness will in no wise hasten what you long for; rather the reverse, for God finds no dwelling-place in an unrestful distracted soul. Do not urge Him impatiently, or strive to fix the limits of His Grace. You should not even wish to taste the sweetness of His Presence until the moment which He has Himself chosen once more to make it known within your soul by a renewal of past consolations. But meanwhile be more than ever watchful over yourself. That unsatisfied state in which your inward mind is, may easily betray you into seeking from without what you cannot find within, and there is a danger lest you be misled into stilling your heart's craving for relief and comfort through unlawful channels—those which reach no farther than the senses and the passions.

When your passions trouble you with unexpected

assaults, let it be your unalterable rule not to be cast down or discomposed. These assaults are but the natural effects of a pre-existing cause, and it is but an additional grievance if you play into your enemy's hands by losing your temper. Nothing is so satisfactory to Satan as to find that he has disheartened you, and to see you growing weary of a contest which, nevertheless, must be perpetual. Rather, if temptations become increasingly importunate, be it yours to grow both more tender-hearted and more resolute; and thus you will be as persevering in overcoming them as the devil in pressing them upon you.

Moreover, these ill-regulated impulses, their character and their endurance, should teach you a closer and deeper knowledge of your own corruption. They leave you no excuse for that ignorance of self which might otherwise hang over you as a treacherous mist. Such troubles will be useful in setting vividly before you what you really are, and of what you are capable of yourself—nothing, truly, save to go astray and lose sight of God. Surely it is worth bearing with trials which bring such precious teaching as these with them. It may be bitter, it must be humiliating, to realize what a world of evil, of contemptible meanness, we carry about within us. But if the fact be so, we had better face it, better learn the sharp but healing lesson; and if you come forth from the trial with a humbler spirit, be very sure that you have gained *instead of losing* by the assault.

If you have to encounter mockery or ridicule in consequence of your good resolutions and their practical results, let silence be your strength. When once you begin to explain and argue, you will probably grow excited and indiscreet. Silent well-doing is the best possible answer to all such attacks. But if you cannot rightly remain absolutely silent, do not take up a defensive line. Gentle and modest words will strengthen your cause far more than energetic self-justification. If your heart is large enough to rejoice in shame and contempt for God's Sake, you will find therein a marked resemblance to His Dear Son, Who was despised and mocked more than you will ever be. But anyhow, never defend yourself eagerly; let your words be few and conciliatory, not argumentative. Those who trouble you do not want to be convinced, and argument will not convince them that you are right. If you feel too weak to encounter such trials, you may fairly do your best to escape from them. Many people find their safest course in shunning such encounters as far as possible.

Above all, try to remember that as your former consolations were destined to promote the forming of good resolutions, so now your temptations and troubles are intended to lead you on and strengthen you in their fulfilment. You have made a solemn engagement with God, and you are bound now to strive to fulfil, amid pressure and difficulty, that which you promised amid

consolation and enthusiasm. But as He helped you in the one, so will He help you in the other. Be it yours only to trust unfeignedly in Him.

VI

Those who would advance towards perfection must submit themselves to three kinds of rules.

§ 1. **I**T is an undeniable fact, that nothing in the natural world can be perfected without rule. All things are crude and imperfect to begin with, and require shaping and moulding in order to attain perfection. Nevertheless, it is a hard trial to the impatience of man's nature to submit to be ruled ; and our natural love of independence and freedom is so great, that such submission is the truest and noblest sacrifice we can make to God. One cannot be surprised to see worldly, thoughtless people reject the restraint which rules would lay upon them ; but it is sometimes startling to find those who are really devout and anxious to advance in the spiritual life unwilling to submit themselves to a rule of life. But such people are deceiving themselves, and in spite of their aspirations, they are really yielding to self-will, and must therein go backwards, not forwards. There are three kinds of Rule to which all who would go forward steadily towards perfection must subject them-

selves—written rule, the rule of obedience, and the rule of God's Providence.

§ II. Written Rule. By this I mean a daily rule ordering times and seasons for special duties, which should not be liable to alteration at the will of him to whom it is given. Appointed duties should be fulfilled precisely at their appointed hours ; and this written rule imposes a continual subjection upon a person's daily life. There are people living in the world who keep their own rule as faithfully as religious in a convent ; but too many who are by way of leading a devout life fail to make satisfactory progress from neglect of this one point. Such people's lives are shaped from morning to night by their own inclination, opinion, or whim. They get up when they are not disposed to lie in bed, they go to bed when they are weary, or tired of conversation or reading ; they make their meditation according as they feel inclined, at one hour or another, curtailing or even altogether omitting it when convenient ; they go to church when no other engagement interferes, but not when to do so involves a sacrifice of some more attractive occupation ; they keep silence when not disposed to talk ; they read spiritual books when the fancy takes them ; they adapt their meals and other personal comforts to their own wishes and appetites.

A penitent who knows no daily rule beyond chance circumstances and the bent of his or her own inclination

will probably submit to such penances as you may impose, and be ready to do unwonted actions, but you will find it no easy task to bring such an one under the yoke of God's Holy Spirit by a gentle but firm rule of life. Such people will fly away and tell you that it is mere slavery ; that God looks at the heart, and that they like to live in the spirit of holy liberty. There is a danger, even if you succeed in getting such an one to accept some mild rule, that he will soon find it insupportable and cut it off, or break it to-day, and keep it to-morrow in a fit of repentance, losing all the benefit of steady perseverance. Those who are unaccustomed to rule are ready to break it on the most insignificant pretexts, from a want of any due sense of its real value and importance. Of course there are many who are not sufficiently independent to keep a strict rule of life uninterruptedly ; the duties of married life or of children at home may make this impossible ; but nevertheless, all persons who are really aiming at progress in the spiritual life, should live by such a rule as they are able to follow, and it is your part as their director to frame it for them, according to their actual circumstances.

There is nothing so very hard in having an appointed hour for special duties—it is no more than everyone is ready to do with regard to worldly matters ; and those who refuse to submit to so simple a restraint, prove that they have a larger share of self-will in their character

than is compatible with steady progress in God's ways. Those ways involve a "captivity" in all things, great and small—a perpetual sacrifice of self-will and freedom; and how can those hope to accept such a Divine Rule, who cannot even bear the yoke of an external rule for their daily life?

Again, having accepted some such simple rule, it betokens great levity and want of purpose to be dispensing oneself perpetually from its observation, as unimportant. There is great grace to the soul in a punctual observance even of what may seem trivial rules, and on the other hand carelessness is a serious obstacle to real progress towards perfection.

Is it likely that a person who has not moral energy to constrain himself to certain simple daily duties, will be vigorous in waging war upon his evil tempers? or that he will find it easier to subdue his passions than it is to submit his will to the restraint of a rule? You may be sure that your labour will be in vain with all such penitents as resist this first step towards spiritual progress. In religious communities an exact observance of rule has been found a surer test of sanctity than unwonted austerities or extraordinary visions when apart from such obedience; and in ordinary life we must always mistrust the most seemingly devout person who does not yield a punctual obedience to the rule of life given him by his director, and whose piety and devotion are self-appointed

and consequently self-willed, thereby forfeiting all that is solid and substantial. You would not be dealing harshly in refusing to have any responsibility as to the direction of such persons.

§ III. The Rule of Obedience.

The second rule incumbent on those who aim at perfection is obedience to their director; and this rule is superior to the other, inasmuch as the director who has enjoined certain fixed duties and hours can dispense his penitent from observing them when higher claims interfere. Now, this is a point concerning which really good people are apt to disguise the truth from themselves to a very hurtful degree. Many a penitent will obey just so far as it suits him; he has his own opinion as to the limits of obedience, and exercises it (if such can be called obedience!) solely according to his own judgment. Or again, where there is no question raised as to the fitness of obedience, what director does not meet with arguments and reasoning meant to alter his views and divert his intentions? Sometimes this opposition is carried beyond the bounds of modesty and respect, or a reluctant obedience is given, while the penitent grumbles and criticises all that is enjoined. Not unfrequently penitents will make a great show of obedience in one direction, the better to cover disobedience in another more sensitive point; while others will suggest the direction in which *they* wish to be guided, and try to distort direction into

an authorized self-pleasing. Some have been so lightly dealt with, so indulged, that they fancy themselves models of obedience ; but if you use the slightest severity—if you refuse any of their wishes, or enforce any unwelcome discipline, forthwith they become disturbed and rebellious. Again, there is a class of penitents who contrive to get round their director so cleverly that they do pretty much what they like ; but it need hardly be said that in such persons there is but little true obedience to the Spirit of God. Then there is the self-righteous penitent, who makes a great profession, and sets up a high standard, but who expects to be dealt with after an altogether special manner ; and if you treat him according to the ordinary rules of common sense, or press home any unwelcome obedience, forthwith his vanity is certain that you do not understand him, and he seeks a new director. Some too, who accept the principle of obedience, evade carrying it out, and follow their own will in numberless matters, on the pretext that they cannot be perpetually troubling their director ; it is not worth while to ask ; obedience does not involve such trifles, which all the while means that they are really clinging to self, and strengthening themselves in a disobedient habit of mind.

Now among all these various characters, there is but little profitable result from direction, and they make slender progress towards perfection. When such come into your hands, it behoves you to teach them that exact

obedience and genuine submission of will are indispensable to any real victory over self. It needs not to dwell upon the theoretical necessity of such obedience; that has been taught by all spiritual writers, and accepted by all; it is the application which chiefly concerns you; teaching your penitents how to offer a strict, diligent, constant obedience as a sacrifice to God, which will purify and enhance every action, and bring His Blessing on the routine of daily life, whereas self-will can defile and poison what in itself might be good.

§ iv. The Rule of God's Providence.

This third rule is inevitable, and cannot be set aside; nevertheless, it may reasonably be called a rule, inasmuch as it directs, guides, and constrains us. In truth, God's Providence conducts us all through life with the tenderness of a mother, while, at the same time, Its law is stringent and inevitable. Some holy souls are apt to cling excessively to their external rule, and then God breaks through that clinging by the force of His Providential Rule, which cannot be set aside by man. A daily rule, implicit obedience to a director, may be summarily hindered by sickness, death, or some unforeseen cause over which we have no control. God overrules everything, and thus what He appoints must ever be our highest and foremost rule, as the events of life prove to us as they occur.

Bearing this in mind, do you never revolt against any-

thing His Divine Providence appoints ; rather submit to all He sends, if not out of reverence for His Will, yet because you cannot escape it if you would. You may dispense yourself from your daily rule of life, or you may shake off the yoke of obedience to men, but you must bow before the Rule of God's Providence. Strive to love it, to yield yourself up to it, rather than to chafe against a chain which you cannot break.

Moreover, it is a rule which cannot be unjust or err ; whatever it brings, is appointed of God. Your rule of life is good and helpful, obedience is a grace, but neither one nor the other is an article of faith. But it is an article of faith that all God's Providence ordains is His Absolute Will ; therefore accept that sacred Rule peacefully and lovingly.

All other rules have their times and seasons ; your daily rule applies to set details, that of obedience may often be in abeyance, but the Rule of God's Providence is continual. Other rules are applicable to particular occasions and places, but this Rule is universal.

Circumstances may arise to which your daily rule does not apply, and you may be separated from the superior under whose obedience you are, but God's Rule is never absent. Accustom yourself and others to see it in every event of life, and by so doing you will learn to meet all things, trials and blessings alike, calmly and cheerfully, resting wholly on God, certain of His Loving Guidance.

§ v. The Rule of inward Perfection.

The three kinds of rule which we have been considering, are all outward ; but there is further an inward rule which is no less important to him who would make progress in the way of perfection. Now this inward rule may be defined as being the special attraction of each individual soul ; that impress which God is wont to make upon it, whereby it feels itself irresistibly and without premeditation drawn to some particular grace, or duty, or practice. This inward rule stamps and governs the soul. But at the same time, bear in mind that all such interior rule must be in keeping with the external rule. That, whether it be a plan of daily life, or obedience, or submission to God's Providence, all is of the Holy Spirit, and no inward leadings that were opposed to it, could be true and lawful. Therefore be sure that when anyone who fancies he is led by special attraction, yet infringes his other rules, he is under a delusion. Necessary as this interior rule is, many souls do not realize or perceive it, and that because men's minds are so often distracted and restless, divided among a hundred different thoughts, wandering, unmethodical. One of the Fathers says, that although God is so nigh, we find it hard to hear His Voice, because of all the tumult within and without, in which we live. It follows then, that the best help towards attaining a knowledge of *this interior rule* is Recollection, whereby a man be-

comes capable of seeing and hearing the Divine leadings. Further, there should be diligent correspondence to grace, free from all impatience, and from that spirit which seeks to penetrate farther into the future than God permits. Curiosity, and a desire for something new, are as poison to the interior life, and will hinder grace from coming to maturity.

When you have found this Divine leading within your soul, be very passive ; maintain a reverent, submissive, simple mental attitude, and so give yourself up to be ruled by it. Bear in mind that it will vary in distinctness and power ; your part is to comply with its utterances, whatsoever they be, and to accept its presence or absence with equal readiness.

There is one other point to be considered, namely, whether or not we are to take the example of holy men as a rule of perfection, considering that all spiritual writers and teachers continually recommend the study of their lives as one of our greatest helps in treading the paths of God ?

To this the answer would be, that we ought to study such men's lives in order to kindle our own fervour, but yet without taking them as our examples of absolute perfection. And here let us define a precise distinction ; for there is a wide difference between an aid towards, and an example of, perfection. Whatever serves as a motive or a reproof stimulating one to work diligently,

is an aid towards perfection, and the good example of holy persons has this effect ; but each man is called to an individual perfection appointed for himself, and for none beside, by God's Will, and you must strive to attain to that perfection, and not stop short in the imitation of any other living being. Such imitation is often liable to lead us into extremes, and human nature always seeks out whatever is most in unison with our own inclinations. The ardent, undisciplined, youthful mind strives to mimic S. Teresa or S. Catherine of Genoa, and may even carry vanity so far as to imagine itself capable of treading in their paths of exalted spirituality. Women especially, are very apt to fancy that they can imitate the lofty aspirations of which they read. It is safer to admire than to copy those who have been endowed with extraordinary gifts. If on the other hand, your temperament is languid, you will probably select some example which is favourable to your sloth, consoling yourself with the thought that if so good a person did or left undone certain things, surely you may be safe in doing the like, thus screening yourself instead of strengthening and stimulating your spiritual energy.

"One star differeth from another star in glory," the Apostle tells us, and the discipline which has moulded each separate star for its own particular glory was diverse. Your perfection must be your own, and not another *man's*. One may be called to it through austerities,

whereas another, whom God has made weakly and fragile, is intended to tread a totally different path. Many an action may be innocent in one man, owing to his circumstances and lights, which would be blameable in another. There is but One Example Whom all may follow safely—Jesus Christ.

VII

Some hints as to giving Rules.

§ 1. **F**IRST of all, bear in mind that you must suit the rule of life you are imposing, to the person you have to deal with, and that not merely to his character and disposition, but to his circumstances and condition of life, always remembering that his first duty is to fulfil the obligations those may lay upon him, and to fulfil them well. Then, again, you must adapt any rule of life you give to the penitent's health. You wish to train him in habits of self-denial and mortification of the flesh and of the will, but you do not mean to injure his health, or to make him feel his spiritual progress and your teaching a mere irksome, painful burden. It is a great matter to know how to mould your own mind to the needs of the individual you are treating. No skilful physician treats his cases on a wholesale principle, although the main elements of his system must be the foundation of all his

treatment ; and in the spiritual life some minds need to be strictly held, and hedged in with precautions and rules, whilst others need very few and very simple rules. It is important for the director to know how to be indulgent in certain cases, not to frighten the timid, or overpower the weak.

§ II. There are some things which can never be omitted in any rule, *i. e.* periods of recollection and meditation, daily self-examination, and the like ; but it is well not to over-crowd time, and to leave people some seasons which may be employed as they may wish, otherwise you risk the loss of a free spirit, which will be followed by weariness, and possibly rebellion. Domestic and private rules must vary with almost each individual, always bearing in mind the natural duties and circumstances of each. In most cases it is well to let some external work, whether among the poor, the sick, &c., or other good works for Christ and His Church, take their place as a matter of rule, and not merely of inclination and convenience.

When a penitent is beginning for the first time to live by rule, it is well to make a point of general exactitude first, and then to press obedience in detail, *e.g.* punctuality, which has a large share in the usefulness of rule. There is far more moral discipline in some spiritual exercise or duty which is performed at a certain cost of convenience or inclination precisely at the appointed

time, than in the same duty made to fit in with our plans or wishes ; to say nothing of the inevitable result of irregularity and unpunctuality, namely, the ultimate neglect and breach of rule altogether. Moreover, in teaching such punctuality, you go far to overthrow human respect, which constantly tempts us to put aside some rule out of consideration for men, or fear of being laughed at. Be firm in requiring obedience in such cases. Oblige your penitents to be very conscientious in acknowledging any breach of rule, and never allow them to pass over even trifling omissions and carelessnesses as unimportant. Possibly such omissions may not necessarily be subject for confession, but they should be acknowledged as wanting faithfulness to the spirit of grace and obedience. Even where there is good cause, perhaps a real necessity, for failure in observing rule, the failure should be made known to the director, and submitted to his judgment, both for his fuller knowledge of the soul he is dealing with, and to guard against the danger of self-deceit and a habit of self-dispensation. If people who are careless in exact observance of rule nevertheless importune you to be allowed to do this and that, to undertake fresh works, add to their devotions, or increase mortifications, be firm in refusing. Some people would much rather do what is out of the way, and in a manner exciting, than comply with a simple rule. Its monotony and lowliness worries them, but the discipline is incomparably more real. High

aspirations and teachings after the sublimer paths of holiness must always be discouraged where a loving, patient obedience to little rules is lacking. True zeal and earnestness will seek great perfection in such humble obedience before they aspire to higher flights.

§ III. Let the tendency of your rules be to foster a spirit of recollection, and, above all, lead those you are guiding to a habit of frequent Communion. There is nothing so essential to the sanctification of life; nothing so tends to strengthen the soul under the battle of the world. In giving rules as to this, however, you must still be guided by circumstances; by the duties of a wife, or of a child at home, by the clinging to worldliness, and the inconsistency of the character you are dealing with. A person who takes great delight in society, who dresses fashionably, and whose general habits are self-indulgent, though perhaps not to a degree which can be exactly blamed, is not so fit for frequent Communion as another whose whole life is an effort after victory over self. Nevertheless, if you see that under its influence the more worldly character is softening, do not discourage increased Communions. A rule tending to greater self-watchfulness, more recollection and prayer, more reserve and self-control on the days of receiving Holy Communion, is often a help to such persons.

Persons must not be allowed to measure the benefit they are receiving from Communion by their feelings, or

conscious sweetness. God often visits the soul most effectually when neither are felt, but when all seems dry and cold. But if you do not find any spiritual progress, if there is no result to be found in the life and character from frequent Communion, then it would be well to retrench the privilege, and only to allow a scantier reception of the Blessed Sacrament until you see a more adequate exertion made to receive it fitly. Occasionally, but rarely, it is well to deprive a person of a Communion, either as a stimulant to greater earnestness, or as a check upon merely mechanical devotion, or as a correction of some fault.

Be strict as to punctuality in all duties ; the right use of time is a valuable lesson which all rule of life should teach. Rules as to devotions, the length of time allotted to them, and the like, should be definite. Nothing is more harmful than a desultory, self-pleasing habit in devotion. The same thing applies to spiritual reading, fasting, or abstinence, &c. . A little thing done regularly and out of obedience, is worth far more, both as an offering to God and a discipline to the soul, than much greater things done irregularly and according to people's own will or fancy.

In many cases it is well to give some carefully considered rules as to dress and personal expenditure. No one who leaves these matters wholly unchecked can be really advancing in the spiritual life ; but habit and conventionality often make it extremely difficult for those who

are living in the world to see these matters honestly for themselves, or to take a right line about them. But here again the director must take the position and duties of his penitent into careful consideration, and not allow any collision between these and his rules.

Never forget how marvellously God deals with each individual soul as a being apart from all others, and let your dealing be in every way moulded upon His. Aim at making each person's rule a source of real strength to them—a stay, a defence, a ladder to Heaven, not a perfunctory burden which will rather hinder them. All this rests to a great degree in the director's hands.

VIII

Fervent beginners must be watchful over themselves, and not set too eagerly to work.

§ I. **T**HIS is a maxim which will be unacceptable to zealous men whose mind and heart burn to be at work for God ; nevertheless, it is a caution which must be given to those who are young, who are beginning to devote themselves heartily to God's service, and are possessed with earnest zeal for their fellow-creatures' good. Let all such ask amid the noble and generous impulses with which the Spirit of Grace kindles them ;—Do you sufficiently remember that the devil is skilful in

exciting an impatience to be up and doing, which even in good works is a very treacherous snare? Satan will come in the garb of an angel of light, and suggest so many reasons why your zeal should not be wasted, that without strict watchfulness you will be carried away. You will plead that the love of Christ constrains you; that you cannot resist the warmth of Divine fire which kindles you; that your conscience forces you to speed to your brethren's succour; that a man should put aside all selfish considerations, and hasten to stretch forth his hand to the support of others. Nevertheless, Satan may delude you, if you hearken incautiously to such arguments.

There are four kinds of good works into which such untutored zeal may lead a man to rush hastily, and before he is duly prepared:—1. Missions. 2. Confession and direction of souls. 3. Spiritual conferences. 4. Charitable undertakings among the poor.

Now, let us suppose that having spent as yet but few years in study and preparation for the duties of your sacred ministry, you are nevertheless full of a holy ardour, glowing with earnestness, and eager to use and impart to others the grace which God has shed upon you. First then, consider; Are you really able to do much for others, while you have still so much to do for yourself? Are not your lights, your fervours, your knowledge of God, your spirit of mortification, as yet in their infancy—good beginnings, but as yet beginnings only?

Unformed yourself, are you capable of forming others? Weak and tottering, can you bear the burdens of other men? Is your supply of grace enough to be imparted to your neighbour? and is there not a risk where the master is himself but a novice in the lesson he teaches? Surely it is necessary that some time should be given to ripen your own holiness and zeal before you are able to form other minds and create such graces in others?


Men who would devote themselves to their brethren in the ministry of teaching, whether it be preaching, mission work, or spiritual direction, ought to be well filled with that which they intend to pour out; otherwise they will soon exhaust themselves, and give but a poor unsatisfying nourishment to their spiritual children. This is too common a result with priests who anticipate their powers, who begin to teach while they should yet be learners—and who, neglecting to strive after a constant growth both in their own intellectual and spiritual education, soon run dry, and damage themselves and others. It is hard to teach mortification to other men, when we are little trained ourselves in self-denial; and words which are not seconded by actions will avail but little.

Again, have you sufficiently reflected, that before you can go forth safely to exercise your office as a teacher of the spiritual life, your own soul ought to have acquired an habitual union with God? Holy aspirations and glowing fervour, without a stedfastly-rooted habit of union to

Him, will be like the flowers we gather at morning-tide—withered and dead ere night. There are many trials, many perils to be met with in your priestly dealings with souls; are you strong enough, consistent enough, recollected enough to meet them humbly, but yet calmly and firmly, without growing anxious, restless, over-eager, absorbed in that which is without?

The seed which took no deep root was soon devoured by the fowls of the air, and your short-lived untrained gifts may be wasted or smothered if they are not diligently husbanded and cultivated. The older and better prepared men grow, the more they are wont to feel the responsibility and risk they incur in teaching others; the more they shrink from the possible evils to their own souls and those of their flock which surround them, the more thankfully they embrace every means whereby to learn and train themselves for the weighty duties of their sacred office.

Mission work is most exhausting; it requires every hour of the day, and every faculty, mental and bodily, is taxed to the utmost. The holiest men find it hard at such times to spare any minutes for their own personal sanctification; and if you are young and untrained, you may possibly touch and influence those to whom you speak, but there will be a danger to yourself of spiritual dissipation, of a loss of union with God; a danger lest the fire which kindles you be purely natural, lest you




commit indiscretions for want of experience and thought, lest you become too expansive, lest you misapply treatment, lest you disturb and frighten consciences when they need calming, from an excess of zeal. If possible, such work should not be engaged in without careful preparation, without maturely studying what you are going to undertake, without a season of study and silence more or less prolonged according to your circumstances.

Again, as to confession and the guidance of souls. These imply a close study of spiritual things ; have you had time as yet for it? A man does not acquire such knowledge by a little superficial reading, attending one or two retreats, and adopting a certain mystic phraseology. It is only to be acquired by experience and diligent guard over your own heart, and by continual reverent familiarity with God. If you rush lightly or hastily into such work, you will be sure to give rash judgments ; you will be easily deceived and dazzled by unreal persons ; you will become critical of all those priests who are less self-confident, and so less severe in their dealings, than you are ; it may be you will grow self-satisfied, and on the strength of a demure manner, and a few unctuous expressions, you may imagine yourself to have special gifts as a confessor ! This applies equally to all spiritual intercourse with souls.

Preaching is somewhat different ; nevertheless, be cautious also here. You may feel a certain capacity

for this ministration, by reason of an abundance of warmth and ardent feeling which God has given you. But beware lest under this there lurk a treacherous vanity as to your pious thoughts and glowing language, an affectation of spirituality or novelty, overstrained outpourings, self-conscious sentimentality, unreality. All these are perils to a man who goes hastily to work without due recollection, and who thinks too much of himself, too little of God.

Even good works among the suffering and sorrowful require a caution, lest your zeal and pitiful tenderness to relieve the manifold wants which surround you, which in themselves are most admirable, should lead you to neglect that care for your own soul which is no less your duty than care for other men. Beware lest in a continual bustle of external work, whether it be among the sick and poor, in hospitals or prisons, or other like occupations, you acquire a habit of hurry, a sort of spiritual dissipation which has a power of hindering your union with God as well as dissipation of another kind; lest you curtail or grow distracted in your personal religious exercises because of the pressure from without; lest you get into a way of being always in movement, running here and there, at everybody's beck, perhaps becoming an indiscreet, importunate beggar on behalf of your favourite schemes; lest you grow pre-occupied, and incapable of quiet prayer and meditation, through



the multitude of your exterior engagements. It may be that your own soul will need more care than any of your sick people ; and nothing but great stedfastness and a self-contained mind can carry you safely through a life of exciting active work.

1. The wiser and holier a man is, the more he fears that intercourse with the outer world which his office involves, and the more he hedges himself in with the safeguards of humility and watchfulness. He knows that the best Christians have need to mistrust their own strength, and moreover, he knows his own special weakness ; consequently he never goes forth from within save with fear. How much more should you, who are but a beginner, the foundations of whose spiritual life are but newly made, tremble when you are called to exercise your office as a teacher ?

2. If you feel a lurking inclination to come forward, however much it may be veiled under a specious pretext of doing good, mistrust it as the expression of ill-concealed natural impatience and vanity. There is no time or age when a man may not safely suspect his disposition to come forward and assume a prominent place.

3. Those who are most sedulous in seeking their own growth in perfection will never be quick to come forward save when obedience, or necessity, or urgent charity require it ; and in this restriction they find their *safeguard*.

4. Whoever finds by experience that the best and holiest exterior occupations hinder his own sanctification, is bound to quit them as far as possible, until by quiet study and due preparation he becomes more able to encounter them.

IX

On sundry passions to which the soul is liable.

§ 1. **T**HE best means of subduing the passions.

There are three kinds of means whereby we may subdue our passions :—1. Specific remedies for this or that special evil, which will not bear application to any other ; as, for instance, remedies against pride, which would not be suitable in dealing with anger, or against anger, which are inappropriate to intemperance, and so forth.

2. There are special remedies which a wise director will prescribe for individuals, according to his knowledge of their personal requirements, the treatment that is suitable to one soul being very different to that applicable to another, according to disposition and the inherent strength of their faults.

3. The best means are those which do not rise from any human quarter, but are suggested by God's Holy Spirit, Which is a marvellous stay to all those who faithfully seek victory over their passions.

Again, some of these means are hard and painful to

nature, as must needs often be when the passions are keen and hot; others are peculiar and unfamiliar to most men; but one which may be taken as a foundation for all the rest, is neither one nor the other. It is modesty and an uniform, even composure of the external deportment. But here let us observe that there is a purely natural modesty and composure belonging to certain temperaments which is altogether apart from this. Then too, there is a composure which appertains to persons who have been well brought up, and which is too much an exterior matter to have any great influence over the passions; and there is also a hypocritical false modesty assumed by certain people for their own ends, which will never influence their life. But there is also a modesty which springs solely from an upright, holy inner mind, and consequently it gives a seemingly, well-regulated, devout expression to the countenance and general manner of him who possesses it. Such modesty is habitual, not liable to change or fluctuation, equable, unaffected; offering body and soul in a constant sacrifice to God, and this modesty is one of the best means whereby a Christian can subdue his passions.

Watch a newly kindled flame, how it creeps about seeking wherewithal to feed itself, and how, so long as any such material is forthcoming, it is bright and active. But put away all combustibles, and soon the flame languishes and sinks down beneath its own ashes. It

is even so with the passions ; eager, ill-regulated words or deeds, or unseemly gesture, and a loud unrestrained voice, are all as so many doors which give freedom to their circulation ; and so true is this, that as a rule people who yield to their passions are impetuous and ill-regulated in manner. But restrain that which is external, let modesty and composure put a constraint on the outer man, and the result will soon be felt upon that which is within. Are you not conscious that inward calmness and peace take their outer expression in your face and in all your actions, governing and restraining, imparting a tranquil, self-controlled atmosphere to all around ? It is the mind which governs the body and all its movements, and a habit of Christian modesty and reserve will infallibly react upon the mind, and keep your impetuous will in check. A calm, modest soul, "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit," of which S. Peter speaks, will impart heavenly peace to that which is without, and the calm, modest exterior will preserve that which is within from disturbance and passion.

This is to be observed also in seasons of prayer, as everyone must have found by personal experience ; for when your mind becomes weary and listless in prayer or meditation, the body is sure to share in its discomfort, and to express it by restlessness and constant change of posture. If you give way to this, you will grow more and more inattentive and distracted ; but if you restrain your bodily

fidgetiness, and resolutely preserve a reverent 'devout attitude, as is meet for one who is fully conscious of God's Presence, this external tranquillity and composure will gradually influence your mind, and your prayers will be more earnest and less wandering ; and this both because God rewards your efforts at self-control, and because of the natural reaction of body on mind. And here by the way, never forget either for yourself or those you may guide, the necessity of maintaining the most reverential exterior possible during prayer. So doing, if your mind is not as recollected, as united to God, as you would desire, at all events your body, which is more subject to your will, is doing its best to render Him an undivided, fervent homage. It is often said that during meditation, we do well to take whatever bodily posture is most favourable to the mental process entered upon ; but under cover of this excuse, many people indulge in irreverent, listless, free-and-easy attitudes, which often are nothing more than mere restlessness and self-indulgence, evading the real effort of meditation as far as possible. On the contrary, it is a good principle to go upon, that if you cannot conquer the wanderings and weaknesses of your mental faculties, at least you can restrain them from taking an outward expression ; while by degrees, the reverent, composed body will gain a powerful influence over the mind, and it too, will attain a more tranquil attitude.

§ II. A modest, self-restrained manner averts hurry and impetuosity, which are symptoms of an ill-regulated mind. Modesty hinders all hasty outbreaks and vehemence, and preserves a seemly, recollected external conduct; it checks anger, restrains sharp or bitter words, and brings the outer man under the gentle "captivity" of Christ.

We all know that nature is liable to constant sensual impulses, which prompt us to self-indulgence; even the holiest souls are not exempt from such importunity, but a habit of exterior recollection and quiet is invaluable in repressing all these, which are easily perceived and quickly checked by people who are used to watch over their outward expression as well as their inner life. Then again, it is a powerful auxiliary in governing that dangerous member, the tongue, which is specially wont to break loose when we slacken our recollection. Be sure that if you attain a habit of modest reserve and exterior self-control, you will not find it difficult to govern your tongue. So it will be with whatever are your individual difficulties and temptations; a constant modesty, well-controlled gestures and glances, a composed gait and quiet manner, will give you tenfold strength in watching against and defeating those special enemies which attack and trouble your spiritual life.

It may be replied that there are modest, quiet people who nevertheless, are sometimes carried away by their

passions. Possibly ; but how much greater would their fall be, were they not under a certain habit of restraint ? Or it may be that, while cultivating external composure, they have allowed disorder and irregularity within. Others who admire and say they wish to possess such a modest exterior, are too self-indulgent and slack to attain it ; they will not subject themselves to the least constraint, and they always seek their own ease and convenience in externals. There is another class of men who rather despise such outward self-restraint, as the indication of a petty mind ; but surely this is mere pride ? No one who will bethink him of the lowly, calm composure of his Saviour's deportment, when He vouchsafed as Man to dwell on earth, can venture thus to despise this grace, which, after all, often requires more effort to attain and to preserve than many more showy virtues.

It may seem a small thing to move without hurry, to control the restless or unseemly gestures of your limbs, to restrain your eyes and their too curious glances, to move without impetuosity, to speak gently, and to avoid noisy laughter ; but depend upon it, these small things will tell upon your whole mental position. Such habits are applicable to all seasons, by day and night, alone or in society, in sickness or in health. Strive ever to be modest and self-restrained. God and His Angels are always beholding you. A calm, recollected manner is a silent sermon to all around ; it wins and edifies all who

come under its influence, it gives a gentle peacefulness to a man's outer life, which attracts and soothes others, and draws them to holiness. Your mental powers should be perpetually consecrated to the worship of God, why not those bodily powers which are equally His gift? Such external watchfulness is a perpetual sacrifice to Him, a perpetual acknowledgment of His Presence. Remember that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that, as such, you are bound to maintain reverence and order in the place where He delights to dwell. Remember how your Dear Lord, so to say, appropriates the grace of modesty and reverence, saying, "I am Meek and Lowly in heart;" for, after all, what is meekness but modesty, what is reverence but holiness? They cannot be separated. Leave it to others to cultivate more dazzling virtues; be it yours, His Priest, to become like your Head, meek and lowly, modest and reverent.

X

There can be no real progress in holiness without attacking the besetting sin.

§ 1. TRUE devotion is differently measured by different minds and temperaments. Thus a naturally retiring person thinks to find it in solitude; the energetic man considers it to depend upon activity and a

zealous toil for souls. The austere man can allow no devotion to be real save that which is rigid and severe ; while a tender, loving soul never is satisfied with itself unless conscious of warm affective emotions. A narrow-minded man will measure all devotion by his own small groove of numerous vocal prayers, constant church-going, &c. ; and another, who is naturally compassionate, esteems almsgiving to be its very essence. In this way everyone measures devotion according to his own disposition, thereby making it a thing dependent upon individual whim, and subjecting holiness to our inclinations, instead of bringing those into captivity to its law, as is right and seemly.

True devotion means devoting oneself to God without any reservation ; and as nothing so hinders this perfect self-devotion as a man's ruling passion or besetting sin, it is no exaggeration to say that hearty devotion and real progress towards perfection consist in victory over that besetting sin. But this is a very sensitive matter, and many people utterly refuse to attack it, although they are expending a fruitless energy in other directions.

There is no question as to everyone being subject to some besetting sin. Of course there are the elements of most evil passions in us all, but these are unequally developed, some being strong and vigorous, while others are scarcely perceptible ; but anyone who will take the trouble to search his own heart carefully, will be sure to

find some passion which preponderates over all the rest, which is stronger, more apparent, more pervading, which overrules his other faults, and leads them in its train. In one this ruling passion may be anger and impatience ; in another an excessive softness and yielding to the affections ; some are beset by a strong aversion to all that is antipathetic to them, which fills them with perpetual gall and bitterness ; others by an ambitious spirit, which is always struggling to be first. Some people's ruling passion is to censure and condemn unsparingly whatever is not exactly according to their mind ; others have a restless tongue, which can never keep silence ; while another class of well-meaning persons are so fond of independence that they cannot bear the slightest control ; and others it may be, give way unresistingly to the indulgence of their taste and bodily ease. Now, in each one of us there is some such dominant fault, which is the root and life of all we do ; which rules us with sovereign power, which is the very essence of our individuality, and which moulds us till it becomes, as the saying is, our second nature. And this is the besetting sin on which a man's energies must be concentrated, in order to overrule and eradicate it, if he would make any real progress in holiness ; for it is vain to try and conquer other faults while this is left in possession of the field. Yet this is just where, when you come to deal with souls, you will find that so many fail. They blindly spare them-

selves in that one most essential quarter, fondly flattering themselves with the hope that all is right, because they are not altogether unwatchful over some other failings. But it must be a primary rule for all who aim at spiritual progress that there can be none really made without a steadfast effort to subdue the besetting sin. The impatient, passionate man must control his temper ; he who is the slave of his affections must fly from all that excites them ; he who is liable to special aversions must correct the tendency ; the ambitious man must learn to efface himself ; the censorious man must strive to be charitable in his judgments ; the profuse talker to restrain his tongue ; the independent character to submit himself ; the sensualist to deny himself.

Let us now consider, first, why men are so slack in striving against their besetting sins ; and second, the great necessity of this labour.

§ II. Why men are so slack in striving against their besetting sin. We must confess that this neglect is to be found among good men as well as among the common herd of indifferent Christians ; and that chiefly because they do not sufficiently estimate the danger and importance of the evil. Many people who on the whole seek after that which is good and practise sundry virtues, use this as a kind of cloak to conceal the real evil of their besetting sin. Thus he who is yielding to excessive earthly affection overlooks his danger because he feels

a lively devotion stirring within him ; the angry, impatient man finds an excuse in his zeal and energy for the truth ; the self-seeking man, who is always striving to put himself forward, pleads his many acts of usefulness, his unsparing toil for his neighbour ; the indolent, careless man who neglects his duties, comforts himself with the reflection that he is unassuming, that he does not slander or injure others : he who gives way to bitter personal dislikes, thinks to condone these by his kindness to many others whom he likes, and so on—in all cases practising a self-deceit which blinds them to the truth. Again, people reckon themselves as comparatively innocent, because, though they confess to certain angry tempers or weak affections, they never push these so far as actual criminal acts ; true, they indulge dislikes and aversions, but they would not deliberately injure the objects thereof ; the ambitious man assures you that he would not seek to rise to the damage of another ; the self-indulgent man does not give way to every kind of excess. There is no end to the excuses by which men strive to justify their ruling passion, as though because it be not pushed to its extremest point, it were to be counted altogether innocent.

Some people will plead the example of others ; they will tell you that so-and-so has his bursts of anger, his fits of selfishness, his seasons of self-indulgence, and yet surely he is a very good man ? as though the short-

comings of another were any justification of their besetting sin !

There is another reason for this want of courage, and that is the difficulty of the undertaking ; for a man's besetting sin is at once powerful and tenacious—powerful from habit, tenacious and ready to break forth on the slightest provocation ; and but few souls have courage to grapple with so troublesome a foe. They are ready to resist any other fault, if only this may be spared ; but make a point of dealing with their besetting sin, whether it be anger, sensuality, ambition, indolence, want of recollection, censoriousness, or whatsoever it be, and you will find that the difficulty, the resistance, the shrinking, is almost overwhelming. Men condemn the sin theoretically, while they virtually sanction it in themselves, when they refuse to grapple with it.

Perhaps you will find some who are willing to try the fight, but who grow disheartened because it is difficult ; and you will be told by such, " I have tried to sever myself from these too earthly affections, but they are over strong for me ; I have attempted to restrain my impatience a hundred times, but it is just as great as ever ; I have tried hard to govern my tongue, and talk less, but I am carried away irresistibly ; I have promised over and over again not to judge and condemn my neighbour, but directly that anything offends my sense of propriety, I do it just as before ; it is simply lost time to imagine

that I can subdue my ruling passion—what is the good of trying? It is my nature; and if I have my peculiarities, everybody else has theirs!" Vain excuses all! Ask such persons whether they have not sometimes got the better of their besetting sin? and if so, there is no real reason why they should not always conquer it, inasmuch as all victory must be through God's Grace, and that will never fail them. The truth is, that men love their bondage to evil, and hug their chains.

Then too, of course Satan is perpetually raising difficulties in the way of what is so unwelcome to him. He uses all the means in his power to foster a ruling passion; he is like a general besieging a town, who goes round and round seeking some breach, or at least some weak point wherein to prosecute his assault. S. Peter tells us that "our enemy the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." But he who would make any real progress in the spiritual life, will find that without this warfare, this victory over his besetting sin, he is but trifling with holiness; he may be self-denying, he may fast and pray, but no blessing will come upon his labours, so long as he sets up an idol in his heart, even the tyrannical idol of an unresisted besetting sin.

§ III. Why the besetting sin must be conquered. There is but one thing needful to salvation, *i. e.* to serve God, but that involves victory over our besetting sins. The service He wills at our hands is our perfection, and

that cannot be attained otherwise. Study your own heart, and the workings of grace therein. Are not those workings and the self-reproaches of conscience all concerned with that besetting sin which, above all else, resists the Holy Spirit of God? He would reign undivided in that heart, but a ruling passion is lord there, and you cannot serve two masters.

Again, see what it is that most disturbs your peace; what it is that supplies most constant subject-matter for your confessions; what it is that you feel most ashamed of bringing again and again before your confessor; what it is that so sadly cripples your benefit in using the Sacraments? Most assuredly you will find that it is your besetting sin; and however other faults and temptations may hinder you, they are less dangerous than this—the habitual, persistent, almost wilful character of a besetting sin; its continual insidious ravages cause it to be a pitiless tyrant—a greater peril to your salvation than all else combined.

You grant that there can be no spiritual perfection save through death unto self and union with God. But no man can die to self while his besetting sin is lively and vigorous, even though he may conquer some evil dispositions, any more than the amputation of a limb kills a man; nor is any intervening passion consistent with perfect union with God. A besetting sin will rise up as a cloud, hiding Him from the soul. Or take it on

a lower side—you shrink from toil and struggle? Well, there is no surer way of shortening both; for do but cut at the root of the tree of evil, and all its branches wither. A ruling passion overcome is as a corner-stone wrenched out of the building—as the capital of a kingdom, which once taken decides the war—as a general whose death discourages his whole army—as a body from which the head is lopped. All else will be easily done when this is done. What is the good of seeking to dam up the stream, instead of cutting off the source? Learn a lesson from your enemy the devil, who is willing to let you alone in all manner of pious practices and outward good works so long as he can keep you subject to your besetting sin. He knows well enough that its leaven will leaven the whole lump; because its strength lies in the will, which it poisons, and so all good is neutralized. Were it nothing else, surely a true servant of God would vigorously strive to offer an unblemished, pure service to God, and not to bring the lame and spotted in sacrifice to Him; but the besetting sin leaves us nothing save what is lame and spotted for His service. Do not keep back your cherished ewe lamb. He knows what you prize most; He knows all that it costs you to tear out that ruling passion from your heart; and it is precisely that which He requires of you, rather than all the other offerings you are so much more willing to bring. It may be that your ruling passion is the Isaac you are bidden to sacrifice. Obey

the call, even as Abraham obeyed, and do not think that any substitute of your own invention will be accepted while you turn a deaf ear to this.

To conclude, be sure that if you refuse to resist your besetting sin, by degrees all that would now have power to help you will become powerless; your conscience will grow hardened, and your ruling passion will so become part of your nature, that you will accept it as a matter of course, and hardly mention it even in confession; you will be like a man who goes carelessly about, unheeding that he carries with him a deadly disease. Or, if you do sometimes make confession of the errors into which your besetting sin has led you, it will be without any abiding contrition, because you are so used to a state of things which you never really resist. But how fearfully this hinders the grace of the Sacraments! You will gradually grow more and more blind to your sin, you will justify it, you will always find reasons for self-defence; at last you will be altogether hardened, and indulge your besetting sin without remorse.

XI

The means of victory.—General means.

§ 1. **W**E must not stop short in admitting the necessity of conquering our besetting sin, but we must go on to consider how it can best be done; and in truth it is not so hopelessly hard as some are ready to imagine, for God in His Wisdom always gives His children power to do that which He requires of them. A docile earnest heart need not fear but that it will overcome in His Strength.

There are general rules applicable to all besetting sins, and there are more special means to be applied to special hindrances.

1. First then, it is obvious that none are of any avail without a hearty will to use them rightly. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

2. Remember that victory over your besetting sin does not mean crushing it, so as to be for ever free from its attacks. This error has led many people to give up their contest with it in despair, finding that do what they will it is liable to make fresh rebellious efforts—as though victory consisted in unchanging peace, whereas really it means stedfast resistance through many an onslaught. The sin may be conquered, but its smouldering fire may

still not be extinguished, and you must look upon the involuntary sparks it sends forth as a proof that it is subdued so far as all to which your will applies.

3. Again, do not imagine that because you have thoroughly triumphed over this enemy it will never get the better of you again, or you will be discouraged. Weakness, natural infirmity, and habit are very likely to subject you anew to your once conquered foe. But having foreseen this, do not be cast down should it happen ; rather rise up with fresh ardour, and begin your struggle anew.

4. Keep continually before you that this besetting sin may bring you to eternal condemnation, inasmuch as it is the source and motive power of all other sins in you, and if that source is left intact, there is no barrier against the overflow of evil.

§ 11. 1. One useful way of conquering the besetting sin is continually through the day to turn your thoughts to it, as one who is compassing the overthrow of an enemy ; there is no moment in which such an one does not revolve his designs, planning the best means and times for carrying his point. Do you the like. Keep up a perpetual conspiracy against your dominant passion ; if you do not persevere you are sure to grow slack, and to be taken unawares ; but “ forewarned, forearmed.”

2. But further, strive to make this dominant passion

your chief occupation, and not scatter yourself abroad about endless other things. Nothing is so useful as a habit of concentration; a man who fixes his mind on one matter is sure to succeed, because he grasps it thoroughly. Concentrate your attention on your ruling passion, and you will soon discover much hitherto unperceived as to its hidden workings, which will enable you to avoid what provokes it to activity, and teach you to stem its torrent.

3. Let the thought of your besetting sin always have its part in your prayers and meditation. That is the time for seeing things in their true light, as well as the season in which you may look for most light and co-operation from God's Holy Spirit.

4. From time to time dwell upon the mischief which has already accrued to you through your besetting sin; think over the falls, the hindrances it has caused you. So doing you will realize how great a tyranny it exercises, and you will be more earnest and vigorous in resistance.

§ III. 1. Never be discouraged. It is morally inevitable that from time to time you will be overmastered by your besetting sin. Then say, "I am but human, nevertheless I have a good will, and abundance of grace. The first is in my own power, the second will never be taken from me, and I have every reason to hope for victory in time; but I must not be cast down, even though I fall several times in the day." A humble, firm, persevering spirit

will conquer at last, but our pride is wounded at the humiliation of repeated falls, and we are cowardly enough to forget our promises to God, and His to us, and then we give up striving.

2. But supposing that you have in a great measure conquered your besetting sin, still its evil promptings will arise in your heart, and harass you, although you loathe them. Very well. Remember that so long as these are involuntary, they are not sinful, and need not grieve you. Go quietly on, without fear ; nothing save the co-operation of your own free-will can make these suggestions sinful.

3. Beware too, of assigning any limit to the time of contest. The result of so doing is sure to be discouragement when you see how little you have done. God wills you to work on unreservedly ; and indeed S. Bernard says that of some He requires a life-long, stedfast effort, never to the last permitting them to feel that they have won an enduring victory. Set yourself no limit in the struggle save your lifetime, and so doing you will work on in peace and humility.

4. Do not fancy that you are gaining no ground because your ruling passion is still vigorous in its rebellion, or suppose that it is never conquered unless extinct. There is real gain in keeping a lively foe in check, and we are apt to grow careless and slothful when we look for no danger. You are never safer than when amid all

its onslaughts, your mind and will remain firm, in calm trust and hope in your God.

§ IV. 1. One most valuable means of dealing with the besetting sin is that which S. Ignatius teaches in the 'Exercises,' namely, to fix some time in the day wherein to make special self-examination as to that one sin only, leaving all else aside, and searching into the motions, the increase or diminution, the risks and varieties, of that particular fault, renewing your intention of stedfast resistance each time. S. Ignatius puts this forward as one of the most effectual means of victory.

2. Make frequent confession of the faults which you commit in consequence of your besetting sin. So doing you will win great grace to aid your struggles, and you will learn to look more seriously upon the sin ; you will be more ashamed of it, more watchful over yourself. Frequent confession is invaluable in subduing the besetting sin ; all the saints have used it, and we know how greatly it promotes the soul's purity and earnestness.

3. Practise some special self-denial in connection with your besetting sin, as an atonement and offering to God. This will quicken you in the strife, and keep under your foe.

4. Speak freely concerning your difficulties with those who are able to guide and help you under them. Such converse is sure to strengthen you in earnestness and watchfulness.

5. Seek the society of those whose character is most

opposed to the special sin which besets you. This is always a useful check, and either the spirit of imitation or the encouragement which it arouses will help you to conquer yourself.

§ v. Special means of victory.

So far we have spoken of general means, equally applicable to every ruling passion. But special besetting sins have their special remedies ; still keep in mind the same truth, that neither general or special remedies will altogether hinder the attacks of your besetting sin, though they will arm you against being taken by surprise, and make you watchful against its first stirrings as they rise.

1. **ANGER.**—When you feel anger kindling within you, guard every outlet, watch your words ; if possible be silent, but if you are obliged to speak, strive to maintain a composed manner ; external calmness will still your inward excitement, and at least you are offering to God that which is under your own control. Still it is well to say as little as possible ; many words are certain to fan the flame of your wrath. You will find benefit too, in striving to control your countenance and its expression.

2. **SLOTH.**—This dull, heavy sin is to be resisted by striving to do everything heartily and as if you liked it. Constrain yourself to great precision and exactitude, fulfilling your duties with careful punctuality. Nothing is so great an enemy to sloth, which hates to be stirred up and reduced to subjection, as punctuality, which moreover

gives vigour and life to everything we do. If you are in a Community, strive to be foremost wherever obedience calls ; the effort will infuse fervour into natural indolence. Remember that God abhors sloth, and has declared that He will reject the lukewarm and indifferent.

3. **HARSH JUDGMENTS.**—If you are disposed to criticise and judge, strive to be silent when anything is said to the disadvantage of another, and offer this little sacrifice to God. If possible, go a step farther, and say whatever you can in favour of those with whom fault is found. It is unfair to withhold any good of which you know, and so doing you will open your heart to a kindly feeling towards your neighbours. Always try to defend the absent, and to find excuses for them. Put a kindly, Christian construction upon all they may do, remembering how much may be attributed to intention, ignorance, and inadvertence. And if there is no room for defence, remember how the saints have ever referred all judgment to God, Whose only it is to judge all men.

4. **SELF-CONCEIT.**—Consider how insupportable self-opinionated people make themselves, and how much they promote irritation, angry discussion, misunderstanding, and divisions ; remember how easily any of us may be mistaken, and bethink you of your own frequent errors and short-sighted views. Resolve not merely to shun self-conceit, but to yield your opinions to those who may be your inferiors in mind, intellect, or age. Watch

whether you indulge an idea that you are wiser than anybody else, and whether you do not sometimes uphold downright folly rather than give up your own opinion when once asserted.

5. **LOQUACITY.**—If you are a great talker, you will do well to spare no pains to overcome this contemptible folly. Strive to check the flow of your words by imposing on yourself a daily season of silence, wherein at all events you will not speak without real necessity. In conversation accustom yourself readily to give way to others; check your eagerness to reply; be more ready to listen than to talk, and never interrupt anyone. Bethink you how much that is untrue always creeps into excessive talking, and be sure that a busy tongue is the most deadly foe to an interior life. There is no instance of a saint who was a great talker.

6. **AMBITION.**—Restrain all that tends to put yourself forward in action, and watch your words, so as to avoid aiming at giving others a high opinion of your merits. If you are praised, change the subject, and make it plain that you are not gratified by such notice. Receive whatever is humiliating as one of God's choicest gifts; and as far as you have courage to do so, seek whatever tends to crush and humble your pride.

7. **UNDUE EARTHLY AFFECTIONS.**—Check all excessive expressions to or of the person who excites any such in you; refrain from any outward demonstration, avoid such

intercourse as tends to encourage it, and keep a strict watch over your glances and words.

8. LOVE OF EASE. — Some, even spiritually-minded persons, are so addicted to trifling comforts as to be really absorbed in them. Do you endeavour to receive all things as they come from the Hand of God, adoring the Giver ; and if you are deprived of what you want, take the deprivation silently. Sometimes too, give up comforts and conveniences voluntarily ; this habit will go far to overcome your grovelling self-indulgence. When it has overmastered you, revenge yourself upon it by depriving yourself of what is lawful, and always remember that a love of ease and personal comfort is fatal to the spiritual life.

9. JEALOUSY.—Consider that jealousy is as a very poison to the devout life. But if it is your besetting sin, do not be ashamed to face the truth, and confess it honestly ; the one thing which often makes it irremediable is that people will not allow themselves to see and own that they possess it. Constrain yourself always to believe the exact contrary of your jealous fancies ; they are almost invariably false. Make a rule to yourself to speak well of those persons of whom you are jealous ; be willing, nay glad to see them preferred to yourself in all things, whether esteem, office, friendship, or what not, and confess yourself unworthy. Go still farther if you can, and be the means of promoting those who excite your jealousy, with a free hand and open heart.

XII

A man's growth in virtue is forwarded by the corresponding temptation.

§ 1. **T**HIS proposition may at first sound paradoxical, but nevertheless, it is true. In order to understand it however, we must bear in mind that there are two different means by which our growth in virtue is helped on—human and Divine. By human means, we understand those used by your own diligent perseverance under God's Blessing. Thus aiming at the attainment of humility, you practise various lowly actions, and you meditate much upon the marvellous self-abasement of your Incarnate Lord. You seek to promote purity by a careful watch over your senses, by avoiding all occasions of sin, and by mortification of the flesh. You cultivate gentleness by calming the impetuosity of your character, and striving to attain a meek, cheerful voice and countenance. You aim at patience, and with that view you stifle all complaints, and you meditate upon your own deserts, and the example of the saints. You would acquire perfect temperance, and so you refuse to indulge your palate with pleasant things; you would fain have a brotherly love for all men, and to that end you strive to be kind and considerate to all with whom you live, even

to those who are not kind to you, and that for the Sake of Jesus Christ ; or lastly, you desire to grow in the love of God, and with that intent you strive to detach yourself from the creature, to accept suffering gladly, and to die to self. All these are the ordinary means whereby, of our own free-will, we seek to make progress in holiness.

But there are other means to the same end which may be called Divine, because we have no hand in them ourselves ; they are altogether the working of God's special Grace ; incomprehensible to human reasoning, to which they seem wholly contradictory. Thus, God trains a man in humility by the temptations of pride, in chastity by those of impurity ; He teaches meekness through sharp and bitter irritation, patience by temptations of the utmost impetuosity and vehemence, and so forth. Strange it may seem, unless we bear in mind that man's wisdom fails when it seeks to enter into the Councils of God ; His Ways are not as our ways, and He often leads us to the haven where we would be, by the very last path we should expect. It was through shame and humiliation that He caused the Glory of His Only Begotten Son to shine forth ; it is through persecution and martyrdom that He strengthens and confirms His Church ; and in like manner He often grafts virtue and holiness in His servants' souls by letting them taste the bitterness and disorder of the contrary passions. "Who is there save the Lord that is sufficient for these things?"

§ II. Of course, all this does not apply to those whose temptations are the result of their own bad habits, or a punishment for past sin. It concerns only those souls whose whole life has been an aspiration after self-denial and holiness, and whom God visits with sundry temptations as a means of fostering their virtues.

Indeed, such persons are sorely tried, for loving and craving after holiness with untiring perseverance, they feel themselves a prey to all that is most unlike it. Here is one who would gladly rush into a fiery furnace in order to preserve his purity, and yet his imagination is tortured with sensual temptations. Another pines to be humble, and to esteem himself least and last; yet he is beset with vain or proud thoughts. This man strives with all his heart to be meek and gentle, and yet he is a victim to an angry irritable spirit; this other spares no pains to win a patient mind, yet he finds himself continually fretted and eager. Here is one who abhors self-indulgence, and yet he is harassed with the merest animal temptations of greediness; his neighbour would give all he possesses to be kindly and charitable, but he is a prey to secret dislikes and aversions; or his soul pants after the Love of God, and yet he is distracted with unworthy, faithless suggestions concerning Him.

But to all these the answer is plain, Be not afraid, God is working His Own Good Will in you; what seems

altogether a hindrance, is really the source of your best blessing, and if you did but know the fruits of holiness which will follow upon these trying temptations, you would accept them thankfully.

§ III. Mere natural analogy teaches us how much power there is in counterparts, and how opposition strengthens many things. So in spiritual matters a man is kept in the way of holiness by the warfare of temptation; because when he feels the enemy pressing hard upon him, he gathers himself together, and sets himself more vigorously than before to practise those graces which seem to him imperilled. He feels how easily he might fall, and he strives hard himself to stand upright, while he appeals earnestly to God for help.

Then again, the very fact that a man's graces are hidden from him by the cloud of temptation is a help, because self-consciousness is a great hindrance, and there is a disinterested generosity in all he does for God while struggling against temptation; moreover he is all the safer for not realizing his own victories, and for not daring to affirm more than that he has not consciously consented to temptation.

We have all a special value for anything of which we are in dread of being deprived, and this again, enhances a man's desire for those graces which Satan is striving to wrest from him. The devil would not be so keen for a trifle, and thus temptation is as a warning voice, saving


us from the danger of spiritual sloth, and keeping us on our guard. Moreover what can be more humbling to one who is really aiming at the humility of Christ, than to find himself beset with proud imaginations? And is not this very humiliation capable of being turned against the enemy, so that the sufferer shall come forth from his temptations to pride, a positively humbler man? The same thing may be applied to purity, anger, and the like. Conscious of his own frailty, startled it may be, to find himself so prone to an evil he fancied most abhorrent and far off his soul, a man renews his watchfulness, his prayer, his self-discipline, and he will not fail at last to acknowledge that it "was good for him to be tempted."

A penitent sometimes tells us that he despairs of ever acquiring patience; he longs to imitate the Long-suffering of Christ, but do what he will, his heart burns within him, his temper grows hot, and although he is able to restrain impatient words or actions, he feels that in reality, he is thoroughly a prey to impatience. But let such an one be sure that so long as by God's Grace he is enabled to control his actions and his words, these struggles of impatience within him are but strengthening and confirming him in the grace he desires to attain. Which is really the most patient, one who feels no particular excitement, and who, when vexed and annoyed, finds it comparatively easy to be calm; or another whose natural temperament is further stirred up by special

temptations to irritability and haste, and who yet conquers himself, and restrains all outward expression of what is distracting him within? Which man is conquering his sensuality most, he who is naturally indifferent to eating and drinking, or he who while caring greatly for all that is pleasant and luxurious, while tempted it may be, with a longing to indulge himself which troubles and humiliates him, yet resists the inclination, and denies himself the good things within his reach for God's Sake?

Again we sometimes meet with persons who are greatly troubled, because while desiring to attain perfect Christ-like charity towards all men, they yet cannot conquer antipathies and aversions which certain people arouse in them. But if while conscious of this antipathy, he who deplores it strives heartily to do all that is charitable and neighbourly towards the object thereof, and constrains himself to treat those whom he dislikes as kindly as those he loves, he may rest assured that he is growing fast in true charity. Every considerate action is a victory, every friendly word sinks into God's Ear; it is all so much laid up for Eternity.

There is one other matter in which this trouble often arises. Penitents frequently complain that, while they desire to love God above all things, they cannot compass His Love, cannot realize It; nay, perhaps even they may be haunted with questionings and doubts as to the



special character of His Fatherly Providence, or the like. But if a man really desires to love God, all such hindrances and temptations will drive him with a more earnest affection to the Gracious Father, Who will "draw" him on, in proportion to the strength of his desires, and he may rest assured that while he so desires to grow in that love, no temptations will cause him to wax cold; they may for a time spoil his enjoyment, his satisfaction in a conscious resting love, but they will knit his soul closer to God, and like faithful Job, he may say, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

XIII

How to deal with men's natural virtues.

§ 1. **E**VERYONE who reflects at all upon the Christian life must be conscious that there exists an immense variety of character and temperament, disposing different men to the exercise of different virtues and graces, and making any one special virtue much easier and more attainable to certain minds than to others. And this is a point to be well weighed by those who have the guidance of souls, if they would avoid mistakes and delusions.

First then, nothing is more common than to mistake either in oneself or in another some purely natural dis-

position or characteristic for solid virtue. A man believes his ardour and vigorous work for souls to be unmixed zeal and holy fervour, while the mainspring thereof is really natural activity, which delights in movement and bustle. Let him test himself in retirement and the absence of excitement; he will shrink from that because his zeal is, rather natural temperament than the work of grace.

Another believes himself to be kindled with the rays of heavenly fire because in prayer, spiritual reading, or divine offices, he feels his heart burn within him. But let him beware lest his vanity lead him to mistake a naturally warm glowing temperament, ready to kindle and grow enthusiastic, for a higher grace.

We find certain people whose gentleness and calmness is so dove-like that it is easily mistaken for exalted spirituality, whereas it may be merely a shallow nature incapable of deep feeling; while others believe themselves to have great powers of recollection, because their naturally morbid, melancholy character disinclines them for much society or conversation, and they delude themselves with the idea that their brooding and self-contemplation is very spiritual. You will find these persons specially hard to undeceive.

Then again, there is a large class who seem wholly devoured with charity and love of their neighbours—people who are for ever helping others and devoting themselves. It seems a hard thing to say, but very often

such people are merely indulging a naturally benevolent liberal disposition, which leads them to lavish caresses and favours on their neighbours—to seek the affection and admiration of all around—to put themselves forward and win consideration and respect. But this is not real charity.

Natural temperament being thus apt to simulate virtue, it requires to be very carefully dealt with; and strange to say, it is often difficult to train people in the real grace which their individual disposition thus imitates, simply because they are convinced that they possess it already, and that it is superfluous to take any trouble concerning it. Thus it is often hard to persuade a naturally good-natured person to cultivate the grace of meekness, or an active one to aim at real zeal; an excitable man thinks his affections warm enough already; a morbid man believes himself well-nigh a contemplative, and so on.

God gives to each of us such a temperament as He sees to be capable of best promoting our true good, and He means each man to use the gifts entrusted to him, to co-operate with His Grace. The active man must use his energy, the silent man his love of retirement, the warm-hearted man his affections to God's Glory, without which his natural disposition, however good, will be a snare rather than a blessing; and for want of rightly using such gifts, much evil arises. It is a great matter

to know how to shew a reasonable indulgence towards natural temperament, how to turn it to good account, and rather strengthen it for God's service than discourage and thwart it. Yet many a well-meaning director has made this mistake, and has hindered souls by injudiciously forcing them against the grain—crowding external work upon those who are intended for the hidden life, fretting active natures with unnecessary restraint, striving to make contemplatives of those whose whole nature it is to pour itself out in works of mercy and tenderness. The wise course is to utilise all that is good in a man's natural disposition—to till it, as a skilful husbandman the soil, so that it may bring forth such fruit as it can best produce, thereby returning fourfold to God Who gave it.

There is another danger to be guarded against—namely, lest in following out our natural gifts and graces we degenerate into self-pleasing, and holy things should be done merely because we like doing them. To this end they must be carefully watched, lest the good works which we perform in accordance with natural temperament lack a higher motive ; and this very watchfulness will be a most helpful check and curb on the insidious self-seeking of which we should all stand in fear. It will tend to give us a clear sight and ready hand to avert the delusions into which it is so easy and so comfortable to fall ; and when a man feels that the practice of any particular grace or

virtue costs him but little effort, he will do well to redouble his watchfulness.

There is one more suggestion to be made. If your natural disposition is eager and active, try to restrain your outward zeal—and remember that hurrying hither and thither on good works, bustling and talking may be a mere indulgence of your inclinations under a veil of piety. Strive to be calm and collected, to do your work thoughtfully and quietly, and so your zeal will be tempered and turned to God's service.

If you are naturally affectionate and kindly, restrain yourself; check those caresses, that extra-obliging manner, that officious desire to help everybody; these are merely the gratification of your own inclination—there is no real love of your neighbour in them. Strive to be simple and straightforward, and to do good to those around you in an unobtrusive, undemonstrative way, for Christ's Sake, and then your natural temperament will not injure yourself or anyone else.

If you are naturally very quiet and easy, beware of letting things go under the pretext of good-nature; bestir yourself to action, and try to do briskly and heartily what comes to your hand. It is in this way that all God's gifts are to be met, remembering that for each we must give account hereafter, whether we have used them as He intended, or hidden them away in a napkin, like the slothful servant.

XIV

Bodily austerities are not always the best remedy against temptations of the flesh.

§ 1. SOME will demur to this assertion, quoting many of the saints, and affirming that there can be no way so effectual for reducing a rebellious body to submission, as by chastening it with severity. Nevertheless it is not always so. And as regards the example of the saints, let me by the way remind you that while you teach your penitents to imitate their humility, patience, gentleness, and self-abhorrence, an imitation which can never be carried too far, you must beware of an incautious imitation of their actions in matters wherein they may have been led by God's Holy Spirit to do what would be wholly inapplicable and unfitting for others. Not that we can deny the necessity of chastening the body in order to subdue it, nor were it desirable to give any encouragement to the only too prevalent spirit of ease and self-indulgence among us. By all means let the pride of the flesh be disciplined and subdued; but meanwhile, if you would be a wise director, you must not be content with an indiscriminate application of such discipline; you must study the subject with much thought and prayer, and you will find here, as in other things, that

God deals in this matter very diversely with divers souls. It is your part to co-operate, not to resist His dealing.

§ II. Sometimes then, God permits the most pure-minded to be tried with impure temptations, and the strangeness of this trial is a very martyrdom to them. Such as these must be comforted by the assurance that it is but proving them, without any stain to body or soul. "When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Some are allowed to bear these temptations as a humiliation; they were in danger of too great security, perhaps they braved danger incautiously, and God in His Mercy, prevents their real fall by permitting them to be roused and startled by the forewarning of temptation. Such persons must be shown that it is a sign of love, not wrath.

Or again, these impure impulses may be permitted by God's Fatherly chastening to souls who do not sufficiently remember that He is a Jealous God, and who consequently, have given way to some voluntary imperfections, however trifling.

Sometimes we meet with persons, recently converted from sin, who are grievously tormented with that wherein once they delighted. They "have not yet striven unto blood;" and they must bear patiently with that interior warfare which they once themselves waged against their God. Some persons are more naturally prone to sins

and temptations of the flesh than others, by reason of their temperament, and some there are who take pleasure and delight in them, or at all events, who invite them by lack of self-control and self-denial. It is most important for a director to discriminate wisely among all these different classes, so as to apply such treatment as may benefit each severally.

Experience will soon convince you that mere bodily severities are not suitable to all penitents. Some persons are made more excitable and feverish by them, and an indiscreet director will find that he has fostered what he meant to subdue. Again, the tendency of such discipline with certain people, is to fix their minds on the very subjects you wish them to forget; while another class of penitents relies with so much confidence on his austerities, that he grows self-trustful, and falls through self-complacence, amid his boasted severity. Some there are who are voluntarily guilty of great extravagances in this respect, and who, obstinately persisting in being their own guide, lose instead of gaining by such self-imposed discipline.

Then too, there are many people whose physical condition will not stand vigorous treatment, while notwithstanding, they require to be helped in conquering temptation.

§ III. What then is to be done, and how are these harassing temptations to be dealt with? The surest

remedy you can give anyone who is tormented with them is this,—that they preserve an attitude of the deepest humiliation before God while the temptation lasts. He who realizes how acceptable a genuine inward humiliation of the soul is in God's Sight, will feel that there is no surer way of conquering temptation. When the trial presses heaviest, and is most humbling in its attacks, then let the soul bow down, as unworthy to offer itself, or anything appertaining to it, to a God all Holy, all Pure. Such a course will not fail to win His Succour ; His Hand is ever ready to help those who humble themselves before Him ; His Pitying Mercy is irresistibly attracted and won by the soul which shrinks in horror and humiliation from the onslaught of temptation. It is often because of the pride fostered within that God permits men to fall shamefully, and impurity will not seldom be found as a result of indulged self-conceit and pride of life, just as purity is the reward of lowliness and humility. Nor is it well to rest content with enjoining interior humiliation upon those who are tempted. They will find a great strength in the practice of external acts of humility likewise, as a test of their inner truth. To this end they should seek to perform the lowliest and least acceptable offices and duties ; they should work steadily at unwelcome tasks, and as it were, stifle the proud lusts of the flesh by lowly self-denial and abasement. If a man would set to work at some humble, despised task so soon as he feels the risings

of temptation within him, he would rarely fail to drown them, and to find strength and rest ; God co-operating with his stedfast efforts to help himself.

The other remedies which are most helpful under such temptations are meekness and gentleness ; more powerful agents than man is apt to believe. Quietness, patience, calmness, moderation, are all essential parts of true meekness, and their influence can still the most violent temptations, temper the fiercest passions, and bring a man through them, to eternal peace. Moreover, if he is gentle towards himself and others, God will not fail to deal gently with him, and His Holy Spirit will still the tempest of passion within His chosen temple. The meek, tender soul is as it were, a perpetual appeal to God, nor will He ever close His Ear to it.

It may be that these remedies will not suit all cases, and you must always bear in mind that it is a director's part to adapt either these, or more physical treatment, to each individual case, according to his personal knowledge of its need. But in all cases of temptation to impurity, there is no doubt that he who is humble and meek will at least be in the safest way to conquer, and nearest to God's Helping Hand.

XV

On sundry dispositions of the advanced soul.—A serious mind.

§ 1. **I**T seems hardly necessary to dwell upon the importance of a serious mind to the interior life, or the hopelessness of any real progress therein where such a mind is deficient. Seriousness of mind shows itself—1st. In conversation, which it restrains from all exaggeration and pretence, levity and thoughtlessness; a rightly serious man will speak with perfect candour and sincerity, weighing his words. 2nd. In manner, for there are different ways of saying what is true, and there is a calmness and dignity in a serious mind which carries conviction to the hearers. But that dignity must be totally free from affectation, or it will not win respect. 3rd. In abstaining from all that is unworthy and unprofitable.

Some people are naturally grave and serious without any effort, others assume a serious manner to serve their own purposes, while, with a third class of people, that calm gravity is wholly the work of God's Holy Spirit, leaving its impress on every word and work.

Nothing is more injurious to the interior life than the opposite mind, which leads to a light, trifling tone of conversation, easily degenerating into a contemptuous,

unkind, mocking habit of speaking to or of one's neighbours. Even among the devout, we too commonly find a jesting tone—a way of laughing at or making fun of others, more or less ill-naturedly, which is a very treacherous snare to the conscience, and leads to much that is blameable and unbefitting the dwelling-place of God's Holy Spirit.


In some cases this arises from unrestrained spirits and habitual want of self-control, so that when excited, or amused, or angry, people allow themselves to be carried away without thought or discretion. Others who are naturally cheerful and lively, always disposed to be sociable and talkative, are led away by the inclination to please and to make themselves agreeable; they like to be considered amusing, and attract listeners, and they get into the way of talking for effect and with exaggeration. It is possible to have a very lively joking manner which is innocent and harmless, but at best, it is a hindrance to the hidden life. Worse still is the habit of laughing at others, and turning them into ridicule, a dangerous faculty which is easily acquired, and seldom harmless. People are very ready to listen and be amused by such joking and mimicry, but they do not like it when their own turn comes, as it probably will. What can be more out of harmony with a recollected interior spirit than all this?

God's Holy Spirit teaches us something very different.

Modesty, collectedness of manner, seriousness, are what He sets before us in the Bible. "A fool lifteth up his voice with laughter, but a wise man doth scarce laugh a little" (Ecclus. xxi. 20). Noisy, boisterous merriment and laughter cannot be compatible with a thoughtful, humble spirit. "Blessed is the man that hath not slipped with his mouth," says the Wise Man (Ecclus. xiv. 1). Those who aim at being amusing are sure to "slip with their mouth;" and "there is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword" (Prov. xii. 18). "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness" (Prov. xiv. 13); and "the tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright; but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness" (xv. 2). All such "foolishness" is a sin against charity, and consequently a grievous hindrance to the spiritual life. But even in what falls short of unkindness and ridicule there is a downright evil. Trifling and jesting talk withers up devotion, it destroys the taste for graver, more earnest things; it makes a man unable to appreciate heavenly truths, and he who habitually indulges in it will grow more and more worldly and careless. The same must be said of the habit of turning everything to ridicule, constantly striving to say clever or sharp things, and make witty retorts. Even where no malicious intention poisons such talk, there is an inevitable want of accuracy, of consideration and soberness about it, which cannot fail to harm all concerned. And

if this is the case with those living in the world, what must all such conversation be if brought within community life? Well may S. Gregory say that amusing, lively talkers are the most dangerous plague of a community; their chatter is often contagious, and must inevitably lower the general tone. Nothing can be less edifying than to hear those who are aiming at a devout life—whether in the world or not—talking and laughing freely about everything, as though nothing were serious, nothing weighty. Gerson bids such persons give heed lest, while they laugh and jest, they weave the net which will entangle their feet, so that they fall into condemnation.

A serious-minded person will never be taken by surprise or thrown off his balance; his inner and outward man are alike well regulated and controlled; bursts of excitement and vehemence are hardly possible to him, and his composure can scarcely be ruffled. No buffoonery, unkind raillery, or foolish jesting, can cross his lips; his manner and words are cheerful, but quiet and thoughtful; consequently they carry a due weight with them, and nothing that can wound another will ever be heard from him. His heart is stayed on God, and his exterior bears the stamp of that communion, as well as his interior life. Such a person always speaks as in the Presence of God and His holy angels;—cheerfully, brightly, but with a Christian seriousness which never fails, and which is often a check upon the levity of others.



This serious mind can only exist where that Presence is deeply and truly realized. A constant thought of God, of His Greatness, His Majesty, His Omnipresence, naturally stamps those who dwell upon it with a calm, reflective, unworldly mind, and that in its turn influences the outer manner. It has been so with all God's saints ; we never hear of levity or excessive mirth among them, and of our Dear Lord Himself it is recorded that He groaned, He wept, He marvelled, He was moved with compassion, He sighed deeply, but never that He smiled or laughed.


Do not misunderstand this, or suppose that a melancholy, gloomy, repulsive goodness is the thing to be sought after. There is a loveableness, a brightness, a cheerfulness in true holiness which attracts and wins everyone, and this is what the followers of our Dear Lord should possess ; but nothing can be farther from levity or boisterous mirth. The most joyous hearts dwell beneath a calm seriousness, "My Joy remaineth with you, that your joy may be full."

XVI

Those who would make progress in the ways of holiness must learn to "wait" on the Lord.

§ 1. **T**HIS lesson applies only to those who really hunger and thirst after holiness ; souls which are clogged and weighed down with love of this world scarce know what we mean by waiting on the Lord. Neither does it follow that those who do thus hunger and thirst are to extinguish their natural fervour, or sit still in idleness. Let it be their part to work zealously, as though everything depended on their own exertions, and yet the while wait wholly upon God for all results. He would have us do all that lies in our power to attain perfection and union with Himself, and having so done faithfully, our part is to wait peacefully and trustfully for Him to fulfil His "perfect work." Men's natural impatience leads them to overlook this great mystery of the spiritual life, *i. e.* that those who would find God must wait long for Him ; yet for lack of bearing it in mind, many well-meaning persons toil and struggle, and yet make no advance.

There are four things which those who aim at perfection for the most part await from God's Grace, namely, that He would put far their sins from them, that He would endow



them with virtues, that He would make His operations to be felt within their souls, and that He would manifest Himself to their souls. But for all these you must be content to wait patiently. Wait for victory over your evil habits, and be sure that where hard fighting has seemed to fail, steadfast waiting will prevail. Bad habits of long standing need a protracted cure, and are most surely eradicated by slow degrees. When an enemy has fortified himself in our land, he is not often speedily dislodged, and when evil ways have grown with a man's growth, they cannot be speedily given up. Nothing but a patient, firm waiting can win the victory. Let it then be a primary rule in dealing with such spiritual foes, not to fight anxiously, but with a calm, trustful, waiting spirit, which by dint of steadfast resistance to their attacks, is sure to overcome.

In like manner the good that is in you must have time to wax strong. Holiness is not the growth of a day; its fruits come but slowly to maturity; and a gradual work is far more enduring than one hastily or impatiently achieved. In nature see how gradually the perfect flower bursts forth from its sheltering bud; in art watch the artist putting touch upon touch, stroke upon stroke, until he brings about the desired result, and be assured that your soul needs the like treatment, that no perfection can be reached save by degrees, and through patience.

So it is with conscious operations of God's Grace within

your soul, or a living sense of His Divine consolations, you must wait patiently to realize them. Nevertheless, we are all so undisciplined and self-willed, even in the holiest things, we are so eager at once to obtain whatever we desire, we have so little notion of real patient waiting upon God, that it is no matter of wonder that we so often fail in our attempts.

For instance, you set yourself to overcome an evil inclination, but you fix a limit in your own mind to the time of struggle, and expect victory within that limit. Or you strive to attain some good habit, but with the expectation of succeeding in a definite period. You seek after God, thinking yourself reasonably entitled to find Him after a certain length of search. You endeavour to cultivate recollection and the leadings of grace, but with your own ideas as to how long any great effort on your part should be necessary, and very far from intending to keep up a perpetual struggle. But is it not strange that men should thus prescribe a limit to the workings of God's Grace in their own souls, and meet Him, so to say, with conditions of their own making? The result is, that they are disappointed and disheartened at finding themselves mistaken, their efforts grow languid, their desires are chilled, God is not so attractive to them as He once was, and they become indifferent, it may be averse, to the duties in which once they were so eager. Nothing tends more to coldness and disgust in religious exercises than

impatience, upon which they are almost sure to follow. One would suppose, to see such men, that we have a right to the acquisition of virtue, to the speedy extinction of our faults, that nothing is easier than to attain a spirit of recollection, and that God is bound to manifest Himself to us directly that we seek to see Him. Men are not so impatient in the things of this world ; they are content to toil and wait, to begin over and over again anew. They are thankful for any way made towards the object aimed at, nor do they turn aside and say it is no use trying because many of their attempts seem to have but little result. "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for Him, and He will save us ; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. xxv. 9).

§ II. How to wait.

Never limit your waiting upon God. If victory tarries, if holiness seems farther off than ever, if the interior life appears increasingly difficult, even if God seems to hide Himself more than He once did—still wait patiently, wait for years, even till death ; never weary of waiting, never fixing any other limit to your waiting save life itself. "Tarry thou the Lord's leisure," and doubt not but that in His Own Good time He will "comfort thine heart." Try not to be slack or down-cast, kindle your energies, renew your efforts, and beware of growing disgusted with duties to which you are pledged ; remember that you must overcome besetting sins ; you

must grow in holiness and find out God, and persevere. If nature grows weary, still do not be impatient or irritable. Keep yourself calm, bethink you that what we cannot do to-day we may accomplish to-morrow; plod on faithfully and trustfully; be more than ever diligent in doing all that is right; gather yourself more carefully together; let your longings after God be more earnest, and thus draw fresh strength out of your weakness, and let the temptation to be disheartened and give up be a stimulus to renewed but patient exertion. Be like the sick folk who sat round the pool of Bethesda, waiting for the angel to come and trouble the waters, and like them, you will be healed.

There can be no progress without this waiting. Some there are doubtless, in whom God has worked sudden marvels of grace—as S. Paul, S. Catherine of Genoa, &c. But His ordinary way of dealing with men is slow and gradual, “here a little and there a little.” He would have us long and sigh after Him; He would draw us by degrees from our earthly clings to Himself; He never fails to hear any cry, however faint, from His struggling, waiting child. Even if He “make as though He heard not,” be not out of heart. He will not fail to come and crown your perseverance with its reward. Who ever waited on the Lord and was forgotten of Him? He speaks in another sense the words, “Have patience with Me, and I will pay thee all;” nor can our earthly imagina-

tions conceive anything so gracious as that "all." Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard it, nor living soul of man imagined it. One may even dare to say that God *cannot* withhold Himself from the soul which waits lovingly for Him ; He yearns over it, and will not fail to give Himself to its desires. But He accepts the heart's cravings, which are often the measure of love ; He tests the sincerity of our desires thereby—of our real will to conquer faults—our real determination to stand at the door and knock until it be opened to us. It will be opened at last, never fear.

Moreover, he who has waited patiently for God to bless his toil, will not be inclined to self-conceit or complacency when success is granted : he will be humble in victory, conscious that it was not his own arm that helped him. And a spirit of recollection, attained slowly and painfully through much striving and waiting, will be deep and lasting ; strength will be gained during the quiet contest ; and when God deigns to visit the soul, it will feel that nothing is due to itself or its own merits, but all to His Love and Grace.

§ III. One thing more. Is it only men who have to wait? Have you never made Him—the Holy Spirit of God—to wait, while you turned a deaf ear to His warnings or pleadings? Surely He has waited for you everywhere and at all times, at all ages and in all circumstances, striving to touch and win you ; never turning away because you rejected Him, calling again and again

with untiring patience. Will you not return this patient waiting, or dare you murmur if He Whom you once rejected now tarries?

You can wait patiently for the good things of this life, do not be less in earnest where spiritual things are concerned. "Thou shalt abide for me many days," He said to His loved though disobedient Israel (Hos. iii. 3). Be it yours to answer, "My soul truly waiteth still upon God, for of Him cometh my salvation" (Ps. lxii. 1).

XVII

The life of faith the highest of all.

§ 1. IT may be asked, Is not charity, the spirit of love, "greatest"? Is not charity the fountain-head of all holiness—the very life-spring of faith itself—which without her is as a withered leafless tree? Granted that active charity is in one sense superior to active faith. Love is a necessary element in all the soul's operations. The soul loves whether in crosses or joys, in darkness or light; love is nurtured by all these things. But the highest of all attainments in the spiritual life is when in all such conditions love is animated and guided by faith. Nothing leads the soul so directly to perfection as the spirit of faith, nothing renders it so capable of union with God; yet among those who aim at the

spiritual life, how few give due weight to this consideration !

Most aspirants after the interior life expect to find therein abundant intellectual light, great sweetness, a lively imagination and perception of spiritual truths, and quickness of feeling rather than close reasoning. And thus many conclude that they will never make any progress in their spiritual life so long as they have to contend with darkness, bitterness, dulness, or what seems cold feeling. But this is a great mistake. All those privileges which these persons covet may produce pride, self-reliance, or indolence, instead of advanced spirituality, unless they are ruled and guided by a spirit of faith. It alone has a unity and grandeur which gives strength to bear every cross and trial ; it alone knows how to offer up the soul in a full and unshrinking sacrifice to God, subjecting the reason and every other faculty of the soul in unquestioning, blind submission to Him. If interior trials desolate the soul, faith teaches that God's Empire is supreme within as well as without, and yielding perfect obedience to His rule through faith, the trembling heart steers safely through all such seasons of bitterness. If it finds itself forsaken of the creature, Faith whispers, "*Quis ut Deus ?*" and, confident in Him, the soul rises above heaven and earth, men or angels. Faith walks not by sight ; and therefore it may be at its strongest when the soul is most barren of consolation, light, or conscious

feeling. He who depends on these is liable to be dispirited and sluggish if they fail; but he who acts under the influence of a spirit of faith will not vary and fluctuate with any such tides; his spiritual life is founded upon a rock which cannot be moved. Whatever void there may be found, faith will fill it up; it will fill the understanding, the heart, the will, the imagination, with God only; and he who lives by the spirit of faith will be able to say with truth, as none other can, "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

§ II. There is no mental attitude so free from earthliness, so capable of looking straight at God in His holiness—consequently, so near union with Him—as this spirit of faith—which, as one of the Fathers says, rises beyond all limits of human reason, of nature, and of experience. Let these strive to fetter the soul as they may, the eagle's wings of faith will soar above them. Darkness may lie, vast and chaos-like, between the soul and God; but faith will pierce that darkness, and its clear penetrating ray will reach straight to the Bosom of God. Bitterness may whisper to the afflicted soul that God is no longer the Loving, Tender Lord it once rested on; but faith overstretcheth all experience, and teaches that He is the Same to all Eternity, though out of very love He may hide His Face awhile. Temptation may suggest that the soul is forsaken and left a prey to the enemy, but faith boldly proclaims that God was

never nearer, never more tenderly watchful over His child, than amid that conflict the very fierceness of which is a sacred chain binding him to his Lord. Thoughts of despair may assault the trembling conscience ; but faith with uplifted hand points to the endless abyss of God's Mercies, deeper than the abyss of man's sin. Be certain that faith can triumph over the outcries of nature, the anguish of conscience, the hard experience of life, the restless reasonings of the earthly mind, the most ruthless attacks of our spiritual foes. Above all these, faith will rise serene, and finding its God will rest in peace.

Such was the faith of that poor Canaanite to whom our Dear Lord uttered these gracious words, " O woman, great is thy faith !" What can compare to it in bringing the soul closer to God ? It is in this path that God has ever led His chosen saints. The Prophet went in the strength of his miraculous food for forty days, until he came to the mountain of God ; and what was that strength but the spirit of faith, which feeds the soul with a strength and vigour capable of going stedfastly on through the weary wilderness of this life, until it attains the sacred heights of perfect union with God ? No other path is certain in its safety, free from all delusion and error. None like this is sure and unfailing at all times and seasons in leading to the wished-for end ; no other is so purely and simply the way of the cross, or the highway of true love. It is the " path of perfect

peace." That is no real peace which admits of a misgiving lest the soul lose its treasure ; but the grace which springs from true faith is so substantial, so firm, it fills the mind with such unhesitating strength that where it is, fear of loss cannot penetrate. That was the faith in which Job said, " Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him " : in which S. Peter said, " Lord, Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee."

XVIII

Those who are specially dedicated to God are thereby called to aim at a special sanctification of their lives.

§ 1. **T**HIS seems at first almost a truism. Nevertheless, as temptations beset every state of life, those who have dedicated themselves more specially to God, whether in the religious life, in holy orders, or less openly, but not less deliberately while living in the world, are sometimes liable to imagine that such acts of dedication will of themselves lead to the desired result, and that having made them, the way of sanctification is clear, and no further efforts needed. This is a grievous mistake. All souls are God's property, and owe Him their undivided allegiance ; but those who have voluntarily renewed their self-dedication, and consecrated their lives and faculties to His service, whether living in the

world or apart from it, are bound to a closer, more earnest watchfulness, lest they fall from their high aim. The very fact of such a dedication involves a nearer approach to that Kingdom wherein nothing impure or unholy can enter. His creatures, already brethren of Christ through His Incarnation, members of His Mystical Body by Baptism, His friends through participation of Eucharistic communion,—there is yet another tender title which He takes with those who voluntarily dedicate themselves to Him ; He calls himself the Bridegroom of His Church. And even as a bride gives herself up lovingly and heartily in all obedience to her husband, not wishing to call anything her own apart from him, so the soul that plights itself to a Heavenly Bridegroom gives itself up in a total devotion, active and passive, to Him it serves.

He who can carry out this dedication to its legitimate end, will feel that he has no right to call anything his own, or to act independently of his Lord in any, even the most trivial, action. The most simple duties, the most transient enjoyments, ordinary work, intercourse with other men, all will be referred to Him ; His Pleasure will be sought in all. If the tree be the Lord's, are not the leaves and the fruit His also ?

Among earthly ties, men hold those the most grievous breaches where the bond is closest ; and that which would be as nothing between strangers, is unkindness between husband and wife. The prophets call the

faithless Jewish nation an adulteress as the strongest term of reproach they can employ. And so that which might be passed over in an ordinary life, becomes weighty in that of one who is plighted to a Heavenly Bridegroom. "It is no longer I, but Christ Who dwelleth in me." What strength this thought should give in trial, pain, temptation, or desolation ; He Who dwelleth in you, He Whose you are, beareth all in and with you ! Who that keeps this stedfastly in mind, but will give most diligent heed lest earthliness steal across him, lest any subtle worldly trifle sully the purity of that soul wherein Jesus deigns to dwell ?

§ II. It is above all over LITTLE THINGS that you have need to watch ; such little things as you may scarcely be inclined to consider worth heeding or counting as faults, and which indeed, would not be such in those whose calling is less special, and who are not seeking to measure themselves by so high a standard. A little over-excitement, a trifling eagerness or curiosity, a passing self-complacency, or rest in some earthly delight, a little unpunctuality, or a careless exaggeration. Small as these may seem, almost unheeded by those who do not examine their conscience in the piercing light of the Saviour's consecrated Love, they may be weighty hindrances to one to whom much having been given, of him much shall be required. Look at your whole life, daily and hourly, in that Light, and you will as-

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surely learn to consider nothing little that can for an instant cast a shadow upon the heavenly mirror which your soul should present to your Heavenly Bridegroom. Nor must you forget that, whilst there is this special claim upon your loving obedience in the minutest matters, you are likewise assisted to render it by the special Grace which your Dear Lord never fails to impart to those whom He calls to follow Him. Be sure that if you meet and correspond to that grace, you will find strength to conquer and put away all these trifles which mar your perfect obedience. "The soul which is thus bound to God is as a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks" (Isa. xxvi. 1). "In all their affliction He was afflicted; in His Love and in His Pity, He bore them and carried them" (Isa. lxiii. 9). And the only return He asks for all this watchful, loving care, is that you on your part, give a watchful, loving heed not to displease Him in those trifles which once you would scarce have noticed.

Beware of measuring yourself against other men. It matters nothing to you what their standard may be, if you fall short of that whereunto God calls your own individual soul. That thing may be innocent in your neighbour whom God has not called to tread the special path in which you are treading, while it may peril your crown. Picture to yourself a seraph dwelling amidst

us. Would you not note and marvel at shadows of imperfection in him which you would pass unnoticed even in holy men? And in like manner, in those whose vocation brings them nearer to God than other men, little specks, scarce visible in others, become blemishes and hindrances. The greater God's Love for any soul, the greater is the perfection which He requires of that soul. Where love is the measure, nothing is small. Even among ourselves we are far more sensitive to a slight failing in anyone we love dearly than to a much greater defect in one indifferent. Remember all that each redeemed soul has cost its Saviour; remember all He continually does for His Own. What devotion would you expect from one for whom you had offered your life, upon whom you were daily showering every conceivable benefit? and how bitterly would you feel neglect and ingratitude even in little things from such an one!

God wills His chosen servants to attain to His Own Perfection. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is Perfect." Do not hinder His Work; and if your conscience tells you that you have been faithless, that "your own vineyard you have not kept" (Cant. i. 6), confess it in loving penitence, and without delay seek to rule your life according to that higher standard. Have you not felt, after any such carelessness, that your grace was less, that you seemed more left to yourself, colder,

less recollected, less prayerful? All these are signs of warning, bidding you give greater heed to the little things which you were tempted to think not so very important. Meditate upon S. Peter's words, "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God," and surely those who, by their holy calling, are dedicated to Him, are above all those to whom these words apply.

Awful indeed, will that judgment be to those who having heard His Call, and known that He is a Jealous God, requiring the most absolute submission of the heart and soul, yet through indolence, or cowardice, self-indulgence, or carelessness, have neglected to serve Him absolutely, and with every nerve, in LITTLE THINGS.

XIX

The Holy Spirit of God will not enter save into a recollected soul, or dwell save in a humble soul, or converse save with a simple soul.

§ 1. **T**HE crowning mystery of our faith was the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles; and in like manner, the crowning point of the interior life is the entrance within a soul of that same Holy Spirit, His Indwelling, and its enjoyment of His Presence. The great aim of the interior life is to create in us a new

being by means of a new spirit, like as by the union of soul and body a new life in the natural order of things is produced. But as in that natural order the body must first be moulded to receive the soul, the soul must contract a true union with and animate the body, even so in the spiritual life it imports greatly to know how to win the entrance, the indwelling, and the enjoyment of God's Holy Spirit. In a word, the one main object of all our labours, all our longings, must be to thrust out the earthly human spirit, in order that we may be filled with the Spirit of God. And this can only be done through recollection, humility, and simplicity. O Blessed Spirit, Spirit of Love, kindle Thou our hearts with Thy life-giving fire, so that they may be moved to seek and know Thee better !

§ II. Much has already been said on the subject of recollection ; but we must renew it yet more urgently—for sure it is that God's Holy Spirit will never find entrance where noise and disturbance reign unchecked. Nothing tends so much to banish One Who is Himself Peace and Calmness, and Who carries silence and restfulness wherever He goes. His gracious endearments, His “groanings which cannot be uttered,” penetrate the conscience more deeply than the most eloquent words of man ; His peace passes understanding ; and wherever it is found there will be an inward stillness and calm, how-

ever great the turmoil and agitation which outer events may create around. And when He is about to speak, He looks for a deep, reverent silence—inasmuch as a very slight worldly noise will drown that gracious Voice. Light is not farther from darkness than a restless troubled mind from the listening attitude which He loves to find; and how can that attitude be won and preserved, save by steadfast, devout recollection, which alone closes the ear to external disturbance, and frees the soul from that hurry and confusion which may creep even into a man's interior life? Those who are unrecollected miss the gentle tones of the "still small Voice"; they miss its soft low pleadings; they fail to make the fitting preparation for their heavenly Guest. He looks to find the soul free from earthly clog, detached from all things, in a spiritual solitude so to say, ready to await His visits, and the golden gate whereby the heavenly Guest will enter in, is recollection.

§ III. Neither will this Holy Spirit abide save in a humble soul. There must not only be recollection to win His Presence, there must be humility to retain that Gracious Presence. "The Comforter Whom I will send unto you, even the Spirit of truth," bringeth forth "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"; and "if we live in the Spirit, we must walk in the Spirit"—and that none save a humble

heart can do. Think of the humility with which He vouchsafed to overshadow the Blessed Virgin, so that she became the Mother of God ; think of the humility of the Incarnation itself ; think of the condescension which brings Him down even now to visit our hearts and consciences. Call to mind His promises, so often reiterated, that He will dwell with the meek and lowly of heart, but that the proud He abhorreth. He does not say that He will dwell with the zealous, or active, or ardent, great as these qualities may be ; it is with the contrite, humble heart that He pledges Himself to abide.

It is into the deeps of humility that the deeps of spiritual grace are poured. Nothing is so damaging to the interior life as a certain tendency to look with complacency on our own state, to pass over trifling faults, and to neglect the sanctification of common duties ; and this is precisely what true humility will not do. No grace bestowed produces self-complacency in a really humble heart which refers all to God ; neither will it look upon any fault as small when seen in the light of His Greatness ; or any duty insignificant which can be done so as to please Him less or more. If then, you would have that Holy Spirit of God not only “ come in ” to you, but “ dwell ” in you, offer Him the abiding-place of a lowly heart.

§ iv. Lastly, God’s Holy Spirit will only hold converse



with the simple soul. Simplicity, *i. e.* singleness of heart, is very dear to Him; the gift of a "free spirit" is specially given where that is found, and He delights to kindle the single-minded with the pure rays of His Own bright Light; He comforts them in all their troubles, and smoothes their every path. The simple heart has its special troubles; it is wont to be troubled with an overwhelming inward compunction at the thought of its own or other men's sins; but God's Holy Spirit knows how to lighten this trial, and take away its bitterness, till the soul learns how even to rejoice in its troubles. "It is good for me that I have been troubled." He pours such a flood of sweetness into the will through love, into the understanding by thoughts of peace, into the whole soul by stillness and silence, that the entire being seems to rest in utter joyfulness in Him. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." He breathes the true spirit of resignation into the simple heart; He enables it to realize how brief the season of sorrow is, how endless the hope before him. Even when His Own Dear Hand inflicts a merciful wound, He pours in the wine and oil of His Ineffable consolations, and His correction seems almost more loving than any caress.

A really simple, single-hearted man speaks to his Loving Lord with the fullest, yet most reverent familiarity. When he communes with his own heart, it is as

in God's Presence ; child-like, he pours out every secret of his soul, even such as he might count too trivial for the ear of an affectionate friend ; he does not seek to arrange or systematize his outpourings, any more than an eager or suffering child composes the urgent entreaties with which it flies to a tender parent for help ; he tells his Lord even how cold, and lifeless, and unloving he feels towards Himself at times. Is it not a test of true earthly love and friendship to be able to tell him we lean upon everything as it comes—even it may be, our petty jealousies of, and wounded feelings of which we are sorely ashamed, towards himself ? Be sure that the simplicity of a Christian heart is more acceptable to the Holy Spirit than the best prepared, most studied devotions ; and such a man is likely to benefit more than others by whatever that Gracious Spirit vouchsafes to do for him, by reason of his simple unquestioning faith. Thinking naught of himself and his own deserts, he accepts whatever is given him—he comes and goes—he speaks and acts as he is bidden, without the hindrance of that critical, mistrustful spirit which is so great a foe to many a soul. He is truly as clay in the potter's hand, and his docility is a special means of approach to God.

• Perhaps there is no grace which a director has more need to guard and cherish in the souls under his guidance than simplicity and the absence of self-consciousness.

While it is right and desirable that a penitent should lay bare his spiritual condition, and the workings of his heart and conscience, in the fullest and freest manner to his director, self-seeking egotism, the indulgence of a self-consciousness, which would rather dwell in blame upon self than be altogether ignored, are much to be avoided. Above all, there is danger in a profuse communication of supposed graces and lights, special illuminations, and extraordinary graces. There are people, women especially, who are prone to dwell lengthily upon the gifts and inspirations with which they believe God to be favouring them. These should be very cautiously and strictly dealt with, lest they be a mere fostering of spiritual pride; and it is often well after allowing them to be told, for a director to pass on to other subjects, absolutely without comment. If however, they gain so much possession of the mind as to make persons imagine themselves called to or able for responsibilities clearly unsuited for them (as for instance, we sometimes find laymen meddling with doctrinal matters altogether beyond their province, or women assuming to themselves the direction of souls), then severity and a sharp treatment become necessary to save the soul from all the perils of vanity and self-delusion. A director is liable to deal too gently at first with such cases from gentleness, kindness, his own humility, or it may be occasionally

from timidity, but it is a great mistake. One of his first duties in acquiring a real knowledge of souls, is to learn how to distinguish between the true and the false ; between what is real holiness and what is mere natural temperament ; between God's direct interposition and the workings of mere imagination ; between a true contrition and abiding sorrow for sin, and the natural broodings of a melancholy character or the wounded vanity of a sensitive mind. He can only attain this science,—for a science, and one of the deepest import it is,—by patient study, and still more by earnest prayer. But as a rule, the quieter and calmer that he can make those under his guidance, the more he can repress self-exaltation or any dwelling upon their spiritual gifts, the more sure his work will be. Do everything to keep gifted souls in simplicity ; teach them to be simple in word and deed, in their intercourse with the outer world, in their very external appearance and manner ; let voice, countenance, accent, all be perfectly simple and free from affectation, which the outer world is quick to perceive. And within a closer circle, teach all such to be simple in their spiritual intercourse, whether it be confession, manifestation of conscience, or seeking guidance in the manifold matters which do not seem altogether to belong to one or the other. Teach them to be simple with themselves, simple towards God.

Some directors are fond of making people write a great deal concerning their inner life, and the graces with which God illuminates them. This is a dangerous plan. Of course without it we should have lost much that is valuable, but there are not many Saint Teresas, Saint Catherines, or the like ; and in cases such as theirs, we need not fear but that God will make it plain where He means to make His Gracious Dealings known to men. But as a rule, nothing can be more destructive to humility and grace than to allow people to write down their mental history, their graces and illuminations, with any view of imparting them to others. Most people, especially women, are liable to fall into exaggeration and unreality ; and if their graces are genuine, anything like a display cannot fail to take off their bloom. It is often useful to make people write down their resolutions, in some cases their aspirations and thoughts,—but in most cases for the eye of their own spiritual guides alone. It is humiliating to see how far short we fall in practice of what we can aspire to and resolve. Such documents refresh the memory, and the very disappointment or shame men feel at their shortcomings, is a stern help to their spiritual progress. Reviewing such writings with a penitent may often be a useful means of exciting his contrition, and of kindling him to a fresh start. All such methods, which tend to promote action rather than feeling, are to be

commended, but they should have reference rather to what we hope to win in the future than to what we think we have gained already. It is the director's part to teach his penitents to accept such favours as God may vouchsafe to them very humbly, very quietly, and very secretly. The conscience is God's Own Kingdom. He reigns Supreme. The director is His viceroy, and he must never forget that in the day of reckoning he will have to give a strict account of his stewardship.



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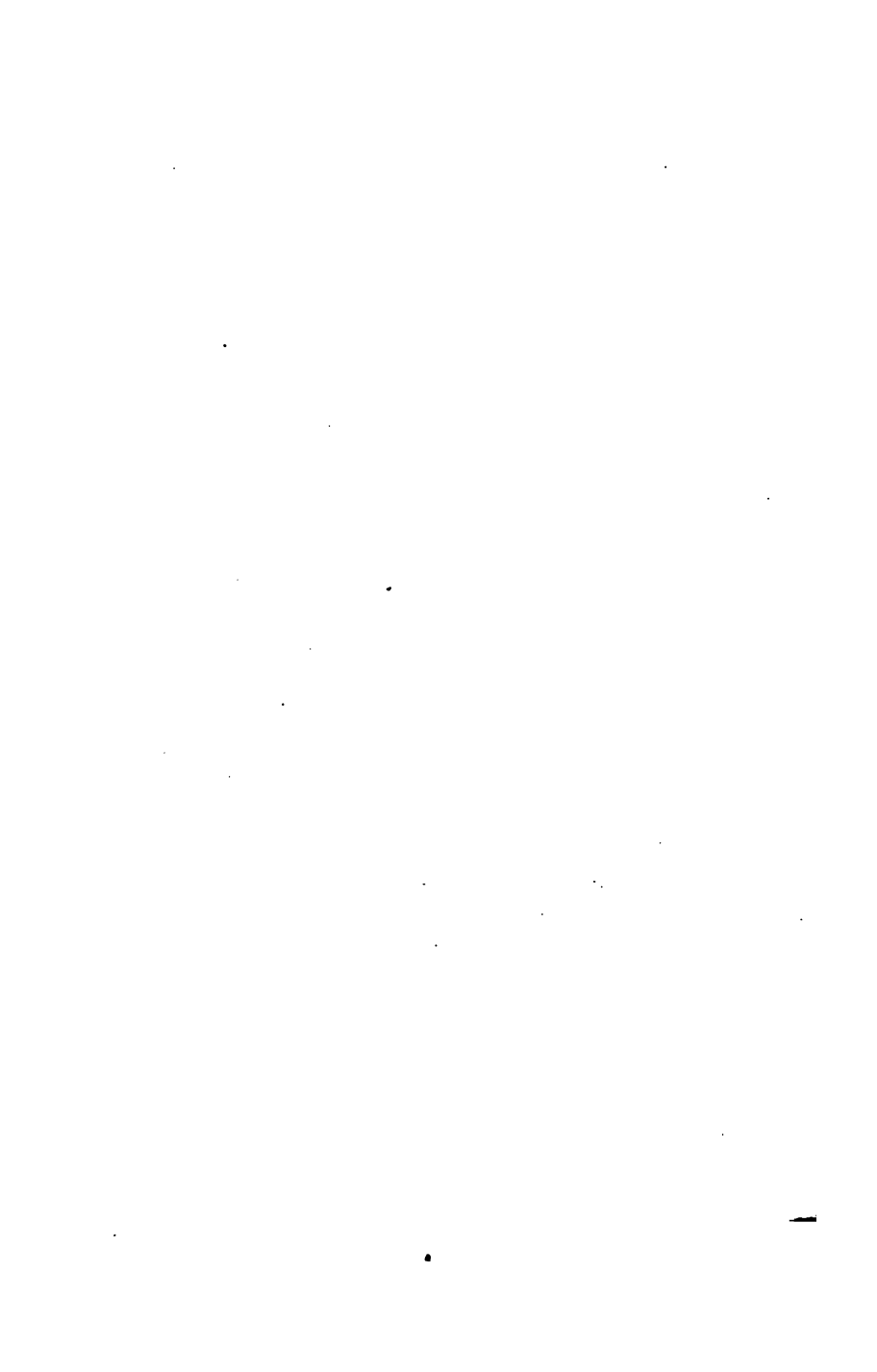
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